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IN THE KTĀBĀ D-MASSQĀTĀ

Sr. Roselin MTS

NEWS

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Editorial

The environmental degradation is one of the defining issues of our generation. Pope Francis' new encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, calls for a "broad cultural revolution" to confront this environmental crisis. According to Pope Francis, the root causes of the ecological crisis are the reckless exploitation of the environment in the name of economic gain, creeping apathy and weak political international responses. We live in a 'throwaway culture' where the individual human being is often treated as a means to an end, or as an annoyance to be disposed of.

In addressing the moral dimension of man's relationship with the environment, Pope Francis presents a fuller vision of creation from the book of Genesis. The human person is not an aberration or threat to the environment but the crown of the created world. Peace of the Garden of Eden would be reestablished if we choose to be good stewards of our mother earth. The greatest contribution of *Laudato Si'* to the environmental dialogue is its systematic overview of the crisis from a religious point of view. Until now, the environmental dialogue has been framed mainly with political, scientific and economic language. With this new encyclical, the language of faith enters the discussion. The encyclical firmly grounds the discussion in a spiritual perspective and invites all persons of good will to view the creation as a holy and precious gift from God. Two entries of this issue of

Christian Orient throw light on the spiritual aspects of this new Encyclical. Dr. Dominic Vechoor in his article, "The Created World as a Sacrament", exposes the sound theology on ecology as Pope Francis bases it on the contemplative and sacramental approach to the cosmos and to the human person. Dr. Pauly Maniyattu studies the liturgical significance of the created world in the light of this epoch making Encyclical of Pope Francis. What we need today is a solid eco-theology of shared human responsibility and stewardship for the environment as a sound response to the present ecological crisis.

In the third article Fr. Naiju Kalambukatt CMI shows how *Mar Toma Sliba* holds a significant position in the spiritual and social lives of St. Thomas Christians. The Cross of Christ has to do with the created world, for the tree of life in the Paradise is a type of it. *Mar Toma Sliba* is erected on lotus as a living symbol of faith in the risen Lord proclaimed and established in India. The leaves of the St. Thomas Cross belong to the created work of God the Father.

In the fourth article Sr. Roselin MTS explores the exegetical method of an early Syriac treatise *The Book of Steps* which presents the community of believers with two main distinct groups: the Upright and the Perfect. The state of perfection is presented as the original state of Adam before he had sinned. Uprightness is the state after the fall.

Fr. Andrews Mekkattukunnel
Section Editor

Reading *Laudato Si'* from a Liturgical Perspective

Dr. Pauly Maniyattu

If Christian liturgy is primarily concerned with the glorification of God, as we find in the Jewish religion, the created world has a big role to play in this glorification. For the Jewish blessing prayers, the creation constituted the very first reason for rendering praise and thanks to God. The ineffable beauty, the marvellous order and the astonishing design of the creation prompt us, the human beings to identify and appreciate the work of God in it. St. Paul insists on this possibility, while accusing those who fail to see the creation as the work of God and the sign of God's presence: "Ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, namely, his eternal power and deity, has been clearly perceived in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse" (Rom 1:20). The liturgical prayers which make use of references to the created world as examples of the manifestation of the glory of God, constantly remind the human beings of their enormous responsibility to take care of the universe, the common home for all the creatures of God. *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis' well acclaimed and much discussed Encyclical on the environmental issues, very well

highlights the liturgical significance of the created world. This article is a short study on the liturgical significance of the created world, in the light of the epoch making Encyclical of Pope Francis.

In *Laudato Si'*, echoing St. Francis of Assisi's poetic prayer, Pope Francis calls for the preservation of 'Mother Earth'. Making use of the words of the *Canticle of Sun* by Saint Francis of Assisi, Pope Francis asks us to look at the Nature as our common home. She is to be seen as "a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful mother who opens her arms to embrace us" (*Laudato Si'* = LS 1).

1. Nature's Invitation to Render Praise to God

Jewish and Christian liturgies praise God as the Creator of all that exists. Liturgical prayers see the creation as the manifestation of God's infinite love. Creation is God's blessing. "In liturgy God the Father is blessed and adored as the source of all the blessings of creation and salvation with which he has blessed us in his Son, in order to give us the Spirit of filial adoption."¹ Catholic faith

¹ CCC 1110.

affirms that the entire space-time is God's work and it is a blessing. "From the beginning until the end of time the whole of God's work is a blessing."² It is our strong conviction that the created world is the blessing of God which makes us confess the glory and love of God. The human beings, the superior creatures in the known universe, have the special obligation to recognize God's glory manifested in the created world and to render God due praise and thanksgiving. Pope Francis stresses this special task of the human beings: "When we can see God reflected in all that exists, our hearts are moved to praise the Lord for all his creatures and to worship him in union with them. This sentiment finds magnificent expression in the hymn of Saint Francis of Assisi" (LS 87). However, sharing the same spirit of Saint Francis of Assisi, the Pope observes that the human beings have the same existential obligation with all the creatures to render praise to God, the Creator.

The Psalms invite all creatures to praise God, the Creator. The Psalms are indeed divine praises. A good number of Psalms are praise of God in union with all the creatures. The Encyclical speaks about the Psalms which "frequently exhort us to praise God the Creator, 'who spread out the earth on the waters, for his steadfast love endures for ever' (Ps 136:6). They also invite other creatures to join us in this praise: 'Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars! Praise

him, you highest heavens, and you waters above the heavens! Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created' (Ps 148:3-5) (LS 72). *Sapra*, the East Syrian Morning Prayer, has most of the Psalms having the theme of the praise of God. "Know that the Lord is God! It is he that made us, and we are his; we are his people, and the sheep of his pasture" (Ps 100:3). The *qanona* of this Psalm in the Morning Prayer is as follows: "Praise the Lord, the Giver of light. Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth."³ Ps 104 in the Morning Prayer speaks about the well ordered creation which is taken care of by God, the Creator. Mentioning each and every important element of the created world, praise is rendered to God. Thus we find God's love and mercy manifested in the creation of the sky, clouds, wind, rain, thunder, land, sea, mountains, valleys, springs, rivers, forests, animals, trees, plants, and birds. Ps 93 also praises God commemorating his marvellous work of creation. Ps 150 exhorts us to praise the Lord, the Creator. The final verse of this Psalm says: "Let everything that lives and that breathes give praise to the Lord! Alleluia!"⁴ Ps 19:1-2 sung in the *Suraya* of the East Syrian Qurbana proclaims: "The heavens show forth the glory of God; and the firmament declares the works of his hands."⁵ The East Syrian Psalter has the addition of a *qanona* with every Psalm. Many of the *qanonas* emphatically proclaim

² CCC 1079.

³ *Liturgy of Hours: Syro-Malabar Liturgy*, Ujjain 2012, 32.

⁴ *Liturgy of Hours: Syro-Malabar Liturgy*, 32.

⁵ *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza*, Trivandrum 1989, 14.

the theme of the Nature manifesting the glory of the Creator. For example, the *qanona* of Ps 18 says: "Heaven and earth with everything in them, adores God the Creator". The *qanona* of Ps 19 is as follows: "Worthy of adoration is the eternal God; he created sensible ones to understand his creatures."⁶ The *qanona* of Ps 19, in fact, speaks out the special obligation of the human beings to discern the work of God in the creation and to render praise and thanks to God.

The Christian Anaphoras or Eucharistic prayers patterned after the Jewish Berakah, commemorate God's work of creation. The fourth Eucharistic Prayer of the Roman Mass has the commemoration of God's work of creation. The *pre-sanctus* prayer is concerned with the creatures in general: "...yet you, who alone are good, the source of life, have made all that is, so that you might fill your creatures with blessings and bring joy to many of them by the glory of your light."⁷ The post-sanctus prayer speaks of human beings, God's special creation: "We give you praise, Father most holy, for you are great and you have fashioned all your works in wisdom and in love. You formed man in your own image and entrusted the whole world to his care, so that in serving you alone, the Creator, he might have dominion over all creatures."⁸ Most of the Anaphoras have the *pre-sanctus* prayer

rendering praise and thanks to God on account of the creation. In the Anaphora of Mar Addai and Mar Mari the *pre-sanctus* prayer, which is the second *g'hanta*, has a clear statement of this theme. The priest declares: "Worthy of praise from every mouth; of confession from every tongue and of worship and exaltation from every creature is the adorable and glorious name of your blessed Trinity, Father, Son and the Holy Spirit, who created the world by your grace and its inhabitants by your mercifulness..."⁹ The fact of the creation of the world by the Holy Trinity is again emphatically proclaimed by the priest in his *kusapa* prayer during the hymn of *Sanctus*.¹⁰ The second *g'hanta* in the Anaphora of Mar Theodore elaborates the notion of God's creation. "For you alone are the Lord and Creator of all things visible and invisible. You through your only Begotten Son, God the Word, the light of your Glory and brightness from you and the image of your Being have created and established heaven and earth and all that is in them; and by the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of the truth who is from you the Father, all rational natures visible and invisible are strengthened and made worthy to lift up praise to your adorable divinity."¹¹ *Laudato Si'* beautifully presents the urgency of such a Trinitarian praise on account of the creation. The

⁶ *Liturgy of Hours: Syro-Malabar Liturgy*, 824,829.

⁷ Eucharistic Prayer IV in *Missal of the Roman Mass*.

⁸ Eucharistic Prayer IV in *Missal of the Roman Mass*.

⁹ *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza*, 37-38.

¹⁰ *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza*, 38.

¹¹ *Anaphorae of Mar Theodore and Mar Nestorius*, Kochi 2005, 6.

Encyclical, too, as we find in the Anaphora of Mar Theodore, specifically speaks of the work of the three persons of God with regard to the creation of the world and its inhabitants. "The Father is the ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists. The Son, his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth when he was formed in the womb of Mary. The Spirit, infinite bond of love, is intimately present at the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways. The world was created by the three Persons acting as a single divine principle, but each one of them performed this common work in accordance with his own personal property. Consequently, 'when we contemplate with wonder the universe in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity'" (LS 238).

2. God's Work in All Creatures

Laudato Si' encourages us to look into the creation in a more profound way and to recognize the work of God in the creation. According to the Encyclical, it is not just the fact of God's creation that prompts us to render praise and thanks to God. God is ever present and ever active in his creation. "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face" (LS 233). Seeing God more in the creatures than just within our hearts is indeed a growth: Saint Bonaventure teaches us that "contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts, and the better

we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves" (LS 233). Saint John of the Cross taught that all the goodness present in the realities and experiences of this world "is present in God eminently and infinitely, or more properly, in each of these sublime realities is God" (LS 234). A true and profound experience of this created world is sure to give us the experience of God himself. Such a mystical experience underscores the intimate connection between God and all beings, and thus feels that "all things are God." "Standing awestruck before a mountain, he or she cannot separate this experience from God, and perceives that the interior awe being lived has to be entrusted to the Lord: 'Mountains have heights and they are plentiful, vast, beautiful, graceful, bright and fragrant. These mountains are what my Beloved is to me. Lonely valleys are quiet, pleasant, cool, shady and flowing with fresh water; in the variety of their groves and in the sweet song of the birds, they afford abundant recreation and delight to the senses, and in their solitude and silence, they refresh us and give rest. These valleys are what my Beloved is to me'" (LS 234).

3. Revelation of God's Glory and Love in Nature

Creation being the benevolent blessing of God, the liturgy of the Church enjoins the believers to understand and appreciate the creation of God. A proper thanksgiving to God consists in believers knowing and appreciating the true worth of the gift of creation. Only when we realize the greatness of the creation we would be able to render due praise and thanks to the Creator. The

Encyclical exhorts us to have a profound experience of the Nature, which is truly the *mirabilia dei*, the wonderful works of God. Citing the words from the pastoral letter of the Conference of the Canadian Catholic bishops, Pope Francis asserts that no creature is excluded from this manifestation of God: "From panoramic vistas to the tiniest living form, nature is a constant source of wonder and awe. It is also a continuing revelation of the divine" (LS 85). Along with the bishops of Japan, the Pope also declares: "To sense each creature singing the hymn of its existence is to live joyfully in God's love and hope" (LS 85). Contemplating the Nature is equal to listening to the message of God. Pope Francis cites the teachings of St. John Paul II with regard to the worth of the Nature as a means to understand the glory of God. "This contemplation of creation allows us to discover in each thing a teaching which God wishes to hand on to us, since 'for the believer, to contemplate creation is to hear a message, to listen to a paradoxical and silent voice'" (LS 85).¹² Pope Francis agrees with the mystical observation of St. John Paul II: "... alongside revelation properly so-called, contained in the Sacred Scripture, there is a divine manifestation in the blaze of the sun

and the fall of night" (LS 85).¹³ St. John Paul II was in fact following the theological view of St. Ephrem, the Syriac Father. According to St. Ephrem, Scripture and Nature constitute God's two witnesses.¹⁴ These are the two modes of divine self-revelation. The divine self-revelation takes place through types and symbols that are present in both the Nature and the Scripture.¹⁵

For the liturgical prayers the contemplation of the Nature is of great significance even to the extent of contemplating the mystery of the Holy Trinity. Mystical theologians have been bold enough to assert that even the mystery of the Holy Trinity is already legible in the Nature. Citing the view of Saint Bonaventure, Pope Francis states that the reflection of the Trinity was there to be recognized in Nature "when that book was open to man and our eyes had not yet become darkened" (LS 239).¹⁶ Evaluating the teaching of the saint, Pope Francis observes that *each creature bears in itself a specifically Trinitarian structure*, so real that it could be readily contemplated if only the human gaze were not so partial, dark and fragile. According to the Encyclical, the words of the saint put forward before us a challenge to read reality in a Trinitarian key (LS 239).

¹² John Paul II, *Catechesis* (26 January 2000), 5: *Insegnamenti* 23/1 (2000), 123.

¹³ John Paul II, *Catechesis* (2 August 2000), 3: *Insegnamenti* 23/2 (2000), 112.

¹⁴ S. Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition", *Christian Orient*, XIV No.3 (1993) 150.

¹⁵ T. Anikuzhikattil, "Theology of St. Ephrem: The Classic of Syriac Faith Expressions", in P. Maniyattu, ed., *East Syriac Theology: An Introduction*, Satna 2007, 98.

¹⁶ *Quaest. Disp. de Myst. Trinitatis*, 1, 2 concl.

4. Elements of Nature as Means of Supernatural Life

Though Christian worship is essentially a spiritual worship (Jn 4:23; Rom 12:1), it is not at the cost of rejecting the material realities. "Christianity does not reject matter. Rather, bodiliness is considered in all its value in the liturgical act, whereby the human body is disclosed in its inner nature as a temple of the Holy Spirit and is united with the Lord Jesus, who himself took a body for the world's salvation."¹⁷ The Nature is truly present in our liturgical celebration through the liturgical space-time. The various elements of Nature are chosen by God himself as means for the sanctification of the human beings. Second Vatican Council teaches this truth in its constitution on the sacred liturgy: "...it involves the presentation of man's sanctification under the guise of signs perceptible to the senses..."¹⁸ By the very fact of the incarnation of the Lord, the space-time was chosen as the privileged means for human sanctification.¹⁹ "For Christians, all the creatures of the material universe find their true meaning in the incarnate Word, for the Son of God has incorporated in his person part of the material world, planting in it a seed of definitive transformation" (LS 235). The Son of God himself declared water (Jn 3:5) as the important means for human sanctification. He chose the material realities

of bread and wine to become the body and blood of Christ, which gives eternal life. Following the teaching of Christ, the Church continued to make use of objects like oil, fire, incense etc as means for human sanctification. *Laudato Si'* emphasizes the significance of the elements of Nature as means for the glorification of God and sanctification of man. "The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise. The hand that blesses is an instrument of God's love and a reflection of the closeness of Jesus Christ, who came to accompany us on the journey of life. Water poured over the body of a child in Baptism is a sign of new life" (LS 235).

Christian liturgy manifests the true worth of the created world presenting it in the most sublime form in the celebration. The order and beauty of the created elements celebrated in liturgy show the model and prefiguration of the divine harmony and transfigured humanity. "Beauty, which in the East is one of the best loved names expressing the divine harmony and the model of humanity transfigured, appears everywhere: in the shape of a church, in the sounds, in the colours, in the lights, in the scents".²⁰

¹⁷ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen* (2 May 1995), 11: AAS 87 (1995), 757.

¹⁸ *Sacrosanctum Concilium* 7.

¹⁹ For the discussion on the relevance of space-time with regard to the sanctification of man, see P. Maniyattu, *Heaven on Earth: Theology of Liturgical Spacetime in the East Syrian Qurbana*, Rome 1995.

²⁰ John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Orientale Lumen* (2 May 1995), 11: AAS 87 (1995), 757.

Material objects used in the liturgy are not just signs, but they have a true value in themselves, first and foremost due to the fact that they are also the creations of God. The prayer of the blessing of incense in the East Syrian Qurbana states the relevance of material objects like frankincense. They are all the creations of God. God is addressed in this prayer as the "Lord of fragrant roots and sweet smelling spices."²¹

5. Man's 'Dominion' over Other Creatures

There has been always the accusation against the Christians that literally taking the expression 'dominion over the creatures' in Gen 1: 26, 28, they maintained an aggressive attitude towards the Nature. It is possible that Christians in the past held an attitude of absolute dominion over all other creatures in the Nature. However, the Church always maintained a positive attitude in this regard. The Encyclical presents the authentic position of the Church in this regard. "Although it is true that we Christians have at times incorrectly interpreted the Scriptures, nowadays we must forcefully reject the notion that our being created in God's image and given dominion over the earth justifies absolute domination over other creatures. The biblical texts are to be read in their context, with an appropriate hermeneutic, recognizing that they tell us to 'till and keep' the garden of the world (cf. Gen 2:15). 'Tilling' refers to cultivating, ploughing or working, while 'keeping' means caring, protecting, overseeing and preserving"

(LS 67). Thus the concept of dominion is referring to the human responsibility of taking care of the created world. This implies a relationship of mutual responsibility between human beings and Nature. The Sacred Scripture makes it very clear that nobody other than God has dominion over the creation. "The earth is the Lord's" (Ps 24:1); to him belongs "the earth with all that is within it" (Deut 10:14). Thus God rejects every claim to absolute ownership: "The land shall not be sold in perpetuity, for the land is mine; for you are strangers and sojourners with me" (Lev 25:23) (LS 67). Therefore, man's claim of absolute dominion over the creatures does not have proper Scriptural foundation. It is the strong conviction of the Church that other creatures are not completely subordinated to the good of human beings, as if they have no worth in themselves and can be treated as we wish (LS 69). The Encyclical categorically rejects the "tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures" (LS 83). Instead of keeping the attitude of absolute dominion over the Nature, by virtue of our unique dignity and our gift of intelligence, we are called to respect creation and its inherent laws, for "the Lord by wisdom founded the earth" (Prov 3:19) (LS 69).

6. Sinful Intervention of Man and the Extinction of the Species

According to the spirit of liturgy, we ought to join the Nature in rendering praise and thanks to God, the Creator. This means

²¹ The Syro-Malabar Qurbana: The Order of Raza, 46.

that the creatures are of substantial aid for us in our prayer. As we have already seen above, the Psalms invite us to join the Nature in rendering praise to God. Here the Psalmist recognizes the intrinsic worth of every creature and its capability of praising God. The created world is to be viewed as the efficient means for the glorification of God. It will be against the will of the Creator to prevent the creatures from rendering glory to God. Thus the human intervention in the Nature causing loss of the living species becomes a sin. Patriarch Bartholomew invites our attention to the gravity of such a sin, qualifying the harms done to the planet as ecological damage. It is "our contribution, smaller or greater, to the disfigurement and destruction of creation" (LS 8).²² He speaks of these damages as our sins against creation: "For human beings... to destroy the biological diversity of God's creation; for human beings to degrade the integrity of the earth by causing changes in its climate, by stripping the earth of its natural forests or destroying its wetlands; for human beings to contaminate the earth's waters, its land, its air, and its life – these are sins" (LS 8).²³ Pope Francis agrees with Patriarch Bartholomew in asserting that "to commit a crime against the natural world is a sin against ourselves and a sin against God" (LS 8).²⁴

The greed of man is the ultimate ground for the destruction of the numberless species of living beings. The Encyclical attributes the disappearance of the various species of living

beings to the human activity. "Each year sees the disappearance of thousands of plant and animal species which we will never know, which our children will never see, because they have been lost for ever. The great majority become extinct for reasons related to human activity. Because of us, thousands of species will no longer give glory to God by their very existence, nor convey their message to us. We have no such right" (LS 33). The Encyclical insists on the existential virtue of the creatures to glorify God: "...by their mere existence they bless him and give him glory" (LS 69). As human beings we have the obligation to use the earth's goods responsibly. At the same time, we are called to recognize that other living beings have a value of their own in God's eyes. From the liturgical perspective man has the responsibility to glorify God on behalf of the Nature. The very presence of a living creature is a solid ground contributing to the *raison d'être* of the worship of God. On the contrary the loss of a single species of living creatures is causing a serious lack in the effort of the glorification of God.

While dealing with the living beings of earth the over emphasis on the human species is quite unhealthy from an ecological perspective. A distorted anthropocentrism can be a true catastrophe. The Encyclical cites the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* which clearly and forcefully criticizes a distorted anthropocentrism: "Each creature possesses its own particular goodness and

²² *Message for the Day of Prayer for the Protection of Creation* (1 September 2012).

²³ *Address in Santa Barbara, California* (8 November 1997); cf. John Chryssavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew*, Bronx, New York, 2012.

²⁴ *Address in Santa Barbara, California* (8 November 1997).

perfection... Each of the various creatures, willed in its own being, reflects in its own way a ray of God's infinite wisdom and goodness. Man must therefore respect the particular goodness of every creature, to avoid any disordered use of things" (LS 69).²⁵

7. Eucharist: Celebration of the Cosmic Communion

One of the striking features of the Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, is that it underlines the fundamental reason for man's care for the Nature. It is not out of man's generosity that he ought to care for the Nature, rather it is enjoined by God, the Creator, because of the intrinsic worth of the Nature. The creation is of great value in itself, mainly because of the fact that God in his love created everything. God loves all that he created. The Encyclical highlights God's love of the created world. "Creation is of the order of love. God's love is the fundamental moving force in all created things: 'For you love all things that exist, and detest none of the things that you have made; for you would not have made anything if you had hated it' (*Wis* 11:24). Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, who gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence, God enfolds it with his affection" (LS 77). Pope Francis insists on God's love that sustains the creation. Citing the words

of Dante Alighieri, the Pope speaks of God's "love which moves the sun and the stars".²⁶

The Encyclical admonishes us to be concerned about the interdependence of the creatures. The creatures of this world, whether big or small, powerful or weak, depend on each other for their meaningful existence. The human beings are no exception to this. This interdependence may be seen as a simple and primordial idea of the communion envisaged in the liturgy. The harmony seen in the cosmos is an example for the communion in the created world. Pope Francis cites the teaching of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* to substantiate the view that there is interdependence of creatures: "God wills the interdependence of creatures. The sun and the moon, the cedar and the little flower, the eagle and the sparrow: the spectacle of their countless diversities and inequalities tells us that no creature is self-sufficient. Creatures exist only in dependence on each other, to complete each other, in the service of each other" (LS 86).²⁷ This cosmic communion is qualified as a 'sublime communion'. The liturgical assembly is a communion. All the living and non-living creatures of the universe, including human beings together constitute an assembly praising God. The fact of being united in relation to the Creator makes the communion of this great liturgical assembly as a sublime communion. The Encyclical says: "...as part

²⁵ CCC 339.

²⁶ Dante, *The Divine Comedy, Paradiso, Canto XXXIII*, 145.

²⁷ CCC 340.

of the universe, called into being by one Father, all of us are linked by unseen bonds and together form a kind of universal family, a sublime communion which fills us with a sacred, affectionate and humble respect. Here I would reiterate that ‘God has joined us so closely to the world around us that we can feel the desertification of the soil almost as a physical ailment, and the extinction of a species as a painful disfigurement’” (LS 89).²⁸ The Encyclical expresses the strong conviction of the Church that “the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone. For believers, this becomes a question of fidelity to the Creator, since God created the world for everyone (LS 93).

The Pope examines the fundamental nature of this communion. “The divine Persons are subsistent relations, and the world, created according to the divine model, is a web of relationships. Creatures tend towards God, and in turn it is proper to every living being to tend towards other things, so that throughout the universe we can find any number of constant and secretly interwoven relationships. This leads us not only to marvel at the manifold connections existing among creatures, but also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures” (LS 240). According

to the Encyclical, the inclination towards communion found in all creatures is “because of the Trinitarian dynamism which God imprinted in them when they were created. Everything is interconnected, and this invites us to develop a spirituality of that global solidarity which flows from the mystery of the Trinity” (LS 240). Thus the celebration of the Trinitarian communion aimed at in the liturgy is already celebrated in an existential level in the created world.

According to the Encyclical, our liturgical task in relation to the Nature is to place in the liturgical celebration the elements of the material universe such a way that they are *en route* to their ultimate goal. “The ultimate destiny of the universe is in the fullness of God, which has already been attained by the risen Christ, the measure of the maturity of all things. Here we can add yet another argument for rejecting every tyrannical and irresponsible domination of human beings over other creatures. The ultimate purpose of other creatures is not to be found in us. Rather, all creatures are moving forward with us and through us towards a common point of arrival, which is God, in that transcendent fullness where the risen Christ embraces and illumines all things” (LS 83). It is the grave task of the human beings to help the created world to attain its destination. “Human beings, endowed with intelligence and love, and drawn by the fullness of Christ, are called to lead all creatures back to their Creator” (LS 83).

²⁸ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (24 November 2013), 215: AAS 105 (2013), 1109.

Eucharist, being the summit of the created world, is the true destination to which every created reality tends. "It is in the Eucharist that all that has been created finds its greatest exaltation" (LS 236). God revealed to the world the value of matter, entering into its depth, and thus enabling us to embrace him. Eucharistic bread invites us to look into the depth of the matter to see God, than looking beyond the matter. "The Lord, in the culmination of the mystery of the Incarnation, chose to reach our intimate depths through a fragment of matter. He comes not from above, but from within, he comes that we might find him in this world of ours" (LS 236). The value of matter is manifested by life and love. The more complex the matter is, the more it attains life and love. In this growth of life and love, the matter finds Eucharist as the final point. "In the Eucharist, fullness is already achieved; it is the living centre of the universe, the overflowing core of love and of inexhaustible life" (LS 236).

Eucharist is an invitation extended to the humanity to work for the communion of the creatures. It is a meeting of human beings and all other creatures; it is meeting where the world in space-time and the spiritual world meet. Eucharist is the summit point which unites all the creatures in glorifying God. The Encyclical declares Eucharist as the true venue of this communion: "Joined to the incarnate Son, present in the Eucharist, the whole cosmos gives thanks to God. Indeed

the Eucharist is itself an act of cosmic love" (LS 236). In order to show the cosmic dimension of the love celebrated in the Eucharist, Pope Francis cites the words of St. John Paul II: "Yes, cosmic! Because even when it is celebrated on the humble altar of a country church, the Eucharist is always in some way celebrated on the altar of the world".²⁹

The goal of the Eucharistic celebration is both communion with God and communion with fellow beings. In fact, the horizontal communion envisaged through the Eucharist, has a cosmic dimension. The prayer "O Christ Peace..." in the rite of reconciliation in the Syro-Malabar Qurbana points to such a cosmic communion. Christ is addressed as the peace of heaven and earth. Prayer is made to Christ to establish his peace and tranquility in the four corners of the world. It refers to a profound reconciliation within the world. It pertains to the peace and tranquility not only of the human beings, but also of all the creatures, both living and non-living. We pray that through the Eucharist, Christ, the peace of the world, may establish true communion in the whole cosmos.

The Eucharist unites the created world with God. Eucharist asks us to consider this created world as striving to attain its goal of communion with God. Hence it becomes our task to help the universe to attain its journey towards the goal. "The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from

²⁹ John Paul II, Encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* (17 April 2003), 8: AAS 95 (2003), 438.

God's hands returns to him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator himself".³⁰

The reality of cosmic communion is celebrated in various dimensions. On the one hand, the material objects become means for the sanctification of human beings. Here our dependence on the Nature for our sanctification is celebrated. On the other, through our celebration making use of the material realities, we express our human concern towards the Nature in transforming it, and leading it in the path of evolution in the direction of the Creator. Pope Benedict XVI, in his Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis* speaks of the human collaboration through the Eucharist for the transfiguration of the world. "The substantial conversion of bread and wine into his body and blood introduces within creation the principle of a radical change, a sort of 'nuclear fission,' to use an image familiar to us today, which penetrates to the heart of all being, a change meant to set off a process which transforms reality, a process leading ultimately to the transfiguration of the entire world, to the point where God will be all in all (cf. 1 Cor 15:28)."³¹

Conclusion

Pope Francis' Encyclical, *Laudato Si'*, exhorts us to consider the Eucharist as a

source of light and motivation for our concerns for the environment, directing us to be stewards of all creation (*LS* 236). The Eucharistic celebration makes us convinced of our obligation to care for the Nature. Only a proper awareness of the significance of the Nature can lead us to such a conviction. *Laudato Si'* teaches us that first of all, the Nature helps us in glorifying God, an existential task of the human beings. On the one hand, the Nature becomes a means for us to praise God, the Creator. The Nature makes us aware of the need of glorifying God. On the other, the Nature joins us in praising God. Here the elements of the Nature are like brothers and sisters to us, sharing one and the same responsibility of rendering glory to the Father. In this worship we form a communion of all living and non-living creatures. This communion has both theological and ontological reasons. The theological reason for the communion is that we all are from the same Father and we all aim at the same Father. The ontological reason is that we all exist, sharing the same matter of the universe. All of us are composed of the same fundamental elements of the cosmos. Because of this communion we all are brothers and sisters, as St. Francis of Assisi rightly addressed the elements of the Nature. The address of the saint need not be considered the generosity of a mystic poet. It is quite reasonable, and for us, the conscious and responsible human beings, who are aware of their grave obligation to take care of the Nature, something imperative.

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³⁰ Benedict XVI, *Homily for the Mass of Corpus Domini* (15 June 2006): AAS 98 (2006), 513.

³¹ Pope Benedict XVI, Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Sacramentum Caritatis*, Rome 2007, no.11.

THE CREATED WORLD AS A SACRAMENT: Patristic Moral Thinking and *Laudato Si'* Converge

Dr. Dominic Vechoor

Introduction

Dialogue with its manifold dimensions has already gained wide momentum in the post-Vatican II theological thinking, especially in the fast changing and much diversified contemporary world scenario. It is also a key word to understand and interpret the teachings of Pope Francis. His second and much awaited encyclical, *Laudato Si'* (LS), is acclaimed to be a clarion call to have fruitful dialogue and conversation with science, religion, culture and above all, with all people of good will and with the hitherto human experiences, in the particular context of the contemporary ecological crisis and environmental deterioration. We believe that such a broader attitude of dialogue will help us to have a better care of earth, our common home and will promote a bright future for it.¹

The created world as a sacrament is one of the leading ideas, reflected in LS, which has its roots in the Sacred Scripture and is closely related to the teachings of the Fathers

of the Church, who serve as an important source for moral theological reflections.² The teachings of the Fathers of the Church are mostly biblical interpretations and liturgical catechesis.³ Hence we deem it opportune to have a reflection over this idea of LS with its cross-cultural slant towards the patristic thinking of the early centuries.

1. Important Eco-Theological Insights of LS

Ecological concern has always been an integral part of Catholic faith and moral teachings. LS brings out beautiful eco theological insights of Pope Francis in the light of the advanced scholarship in Sacred Scripture and latest studies of the secular sciences. Pope's fascination for his patron saint, St. Francis of Assisi and his love of the created planet have also contributed to his ecological insights. Besides the traditional sources of magisterial teachings, he has also made use of other re-sources like teachings of different local Bishops' conferences, teachings of the Orthodox Church and even non Christian

¹ For details see, *Laudato Si'*, nos. 3, 14-15, 47, 62, 162, etc.

² S. Pinkaers, *The Sources of Christian Ethics* (Edinburg, 1995), 207-208. S. Pinkaers points out three characteristic features of the moral teaching of the Fathers of the Church: the primacy of scripture, interaction with the Greco-Roman culture and a lived-in-spirituality with its thorough ascetic ideals as the high point of Christian ethics.

spiritual writings as well. He has also benefitted from the real life contexts of different peoples and cultures, especially from his preferential option for the poor and the marginalised. Some of the important ecological insights of LS are highlighted below.

1.1. The Created World as a Sacrament

Basing on the beautiful cosmological reflections of St. Francis of Assisi, LS strongly proposes that the created world is a 'magnificent book' in which God speaks to us and grants us a glimpse of his infinite beauty and goodness. As Pope Francis writes, "Rather than a problem to be solved, the world is a joyful mystery to be contemplated with gladness and praise"⁴. Citing from Benedict XVI's *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Francis says that 'the book of nature (*liber naturae*) is one and indivisible' and includes the environment, life, sexuality, the family, social relations and so forth.⁵ Basing on a reflection from St. Bonaventure, he writes: "The universe unfolds in God, who fills it completely. Hence, there is a mystical meaning to be found in a leaf, in a mountain trail, in a dewdrop, in a poor person's face. The ideal is not only to pass from the exterior to the interior to discover the action of God in the soul, but also to discover God in all

things...The contemplation deepens the more we feel the working of God's grace within our hearts and the better we learn to encounter God in creatures outside ourselves".⁶

In the sacraments, nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Hence our response to the created world is also closely related to the sacramental theology. Encountering God does not mean fleeing from this world or turning back on nature but to appreciating the beauty, revealed in the created world, which is very much emphasised in the Christian East.⁷ The Pope is also referring to the Orthodox Christianity. Citing from Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople, LS says that God's creation is a 'sacrament of communion' as a way of sharing with God and our neighbours on a global scale.⁸ Nature as a whole not only manifests God but also is a locus of his presence.⁹ God can be seen and experienced in the created world, which is a visible sign of God's grace and a door to the divine but God is also beyond the created world. Hence the immanence and transcendence of God, emphasised very much in the Christian understanding of God, is rightly highlighted in LS. Here the Pope is proposing a positive and creative attitude to the created world as against the Platonic dualism and medieval Christian dualism.¹⁰

³ T. O'Connel, *Principles of Catholic Morality* (New York, 1990), 12.

⁴ LS, 12.

⁵ LS, 6.

⁶ LS, 233.

⁷ LS, 235.

⁸ LS, 9.

⁹ LS, 88.

¹⁰ LS, 98, 100, 216, 238.

1. 2. The Beauty of the Gospel of Creation

Chapter two of LS dwells properly upon the Gospel of creation in the light of faith. It is based on the Judeo-Christian understanding that the whole world with human person as its crown is created *ex nihilo* by God the Father and that the entire created world is good in itself.

Human Existence is intertwined with relationships with God, with the neighbour and with the earth itself, the rupture of which is the sin. The authority over the earth is not an absolute ownership or dominion over the creatures but a mutual relationship of responsibility between human beings and nature. Human beings must respect the laws of nature and the delicate equilibria existing between the creatures of this world.¹¹ Attitude of domination is the root cause of exploitation and indifference to the created world. Human person is not above the nature but in the nature. Basing on St. Thomas Aquinas, the Pope clarifies that the universe is sustained in the harmony of countless forms of relationship and participation.¹² There is a web of different relationships in human life, both I-thou and I-it. Human life is a music of different forms of relationships. Such a sense of interconnectedness invites us to

develop a spirituality of global solidarity, which flows from the mystery of Holy trinity.¹³ Leaving behind an inhabitable planet to future generation is the first and foremost responsibility for all of us. Here the Pope invites for an intergenerational justice and solidarity. Hence LS challenges us to adopt the virtues of universal communion, fraternity and solidarity, oriented towards the common good and sustainable development of all peoples, which exclude nothing and no one.¹⁴ Here we can notice a paradigm shift from a globalization of indifference, which is much reflected in today's culture, to a globalization of solidarity.

Common destination of earthly goods and the principle of common good go in line with the above mentioned concept of interconnectedness. These ideas are very much emphasised in the social ethics and social doctrines of the Church as well. As Pope Francis writes, "the earth is essentially a shared inheritance, whose fruits are meant to benefit everyone".¹⁵ The principle of common good is respect for the human person as such, endowed with basic and inalienable rights, ordered to his or her integral development. The rich and the poor have equal dignity. The natural environment is a collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility for everyone.¹⁶

¹¹ LS 66-68.

¹² LS, 79, 86, 91.

¹³ LS, 240.

¹⁴ LS, 92.

¹⁵ LS, 93.

¹⁶ LS, 95.

The Gospel of creation invites us to see the created world with the gaze of Jesus, who was always attentive to the beauty of the world and taught us to recognise the paternal relationship God has with all creatures. Jesus lived in full harmony with the nature. He was far away from the philosophies, which despised the body, matter and the things of the world. In the Christian understanding, the destiny of all creation is bound up with the mystery of Christ, directing it towards their fullness as their end.¹⁷

1. 3. A Strong Appeal for an Integral Human Ecology

LS makes a strong appeal for an integral human ecology, which includes an integral and sustainable development of both environmental, economic, social, cultural and human aspects of the created world.¹⁸ Otherwise, it will be a false or shallow ecology or an ecological fraud. The ecology, forgetting humans, is a self contradicting ecology. Human life is itself a gift, which must be defended from various forms of debasement.¹⁹ Human ecology also implies the profound reality of the relationship between human life and the moral law, which is inscribed in our nature and is necessary for the creation of a more dignified environment. Learning to accept our own bodies with its male-female complementarity as God's gift, to care for it and to respect its fullest meaning

is an element of any genuine human ecology.²⁰ However, genuine human ecology calls for openness to categories, which transcend the language of mathematics and biology and takes us to the heart of what it is to be human.²¹ Speciality of human being in the biosphere is that he/she is a conscious being, who leads all creatures to heaven. Here the Pope highlights a solid Christian human ecology, which is more than a deep ecology.

1. 4. Towards an Ecological Conversion, Education and Spirituality

Pope Francis speaks also of an ecological conversion, education and spirituality, for which LS constantly invites us. It is mainly through a change in life style with simplicity, cleanliness, sense of beauty, moderation and asceticism. It also helps us to embark new paths to authentic freedom. Here comes the contemporary relevance of virtue ethics through the practice of ecological virtues, which includes the theological virtues of faith, hope, and charity; moral virtues of prudence, justice, temperance and courage; social virtues like respect, reverence, option for the poor and the needy, impartiality and pastoral virtues like compassion and mercy, etc. The authentic attitudes that we should inculcate to the created world is characterised by 'awe and wonder', 'gladness and praise', 'in faith and with prayer' and 'admiration and happiness'.²² When we contemplate the

¹⁷ LS, 96-100.

¹⁸ LS, 137-155

¹⁹ LS, 5.

²⁰ LS, 155.

²¹ LS, 11.

²² LS, 11, 12, 238.

universe with wonder in all its grandeur and beauty, we must praise the whole Trinity.²³ LS speaks of a sacramental attitude to the world, commingled with wonder and gratitude. The liturgical celebrations of the Church have also a cosmological dimension in which the whole body of the faithful renders praise and glory to the Creator together with the entire creation. An ecological mind set up and eco friendly life style are all the more important for ecological spirituality. We also need an emotional attachment to the created world. Here the Pope invites for a genuine mental conversion or mental revolution.

2. Sacramental Attitude: Patristic Moral Thinking and *Laudato Si'* Converge

The sacramental character of the created world is also a widely discussed theme in the Latin, Greek and Syriac patristic traditions.²⁴ They understood the created world as a 'school' and 'book', from which humanity can easily read about the creator with the help of the 'eye of faith'. The first book which was given to rational being was the created world. The Fathers of the Church were deeply aware of the revelatory dimension of the created world and the reality of interconnectedness within the universe.

St. Augustine, a genius among the Latin Fathers, writes: "By this Trinity supremely, equally and unchangeably good, all things were created; yet these are not supremely, equally and unchangeably good; but good they are, even taken separately; while together, they are very good because it is of all things that the wonderful beauty of the whole consists"²⁵ For St. Ephrem, a gem among the Syriac Fathers, created world and the Bible testify to God by means of the symbols and types, which they contain. He writes: "In every place, if you look, his symbol is there and when you read the Scriptures, you will find his types there. For by him were created all creatures and he engraved his symbols upon his possessions. When he created the world, he gazed at it and adorned it with his images. Streams of his symbols opened, flowed and poured forth his symbols on his members",²⁶ He speaks of the natural world as standing side by side with scripture as a witness to God.²⁷ According to him, the music of the revelation of Christ is played on three harps; the OT, the NT and the created world.²⁸

Syriac Fathers express a profound awareness of the sacramental character of the created world and of the potential of everything in it to act as witnesses and pointers

²³ LS, 238

²⁴ S. Brock, *The Luminous Eye: The Spiritual World Vision of St. Ephrem* (Rome, 1985), 136-140; M. Kadavil "World as Sacrament: Ethical and Liturgical Response to Creation in St. Ephrem", *Questions Liturgiques* 84 (2003), 5; J. Kallarangatt, *The Fathers of the Church and Ecology/Malayalam* (Kottayam, 2003).

²⁵ St. Augustine, *Enchiridion de Fide, Spe et Caritate*, chapter 3, n. 10, *Patrologia Latina*, Vol. 40 (English translation in *Fathers of the Church*, ed. Roy Joseph Deferrari, Vol. 2 (Washington, 1966, P. 376).

²⁶ St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 20: 12, CSCO 223-224, English Translation in *Ephrem the Syrian: Hymns*, tr. K. McVey (New York, 1989), 260-468.

²⁷ St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Paradise*, 5: 2, 6: 1.

²⁸ St. Ephrem, *Hymns on Virginity*, 27: 4.

to the creator. Nothing in the universe stands in isolation. St. Ephrem considers the universe as a *totum* and *continuum*. Speaking about the Syriac patristic emphasis, S. Brock speaks of three levels of interrelationship of the created world, i.e. within humanity as a whole, within creation as a whole and between the material world and the spiritual world.²⁹ In line with the Semitic understanding of the functional interpretation of the 'image of God', the Syriac Fathers understands 'image' in terms of delegated authority with free will, which excludes all tyranny, dominion and exploitation of the nature.³⁰ Different from the Semitic mind, the Greek Fathers followed a spiritual interpretation of the image of God. For the Semitic mind, the human persons are not the owners of the biosphere but only its tenants.

The attitude of wonder is a key to open the patristic notion of the sacramentality of the world.³¹ The wonder is not only before the mystery of incarnation and paschal

mysteries but also at the mystery of the created world. For the Fathers, the right attitude to nature and its resources is essentially one of wonder, admiration, adoration, love, respect and gratitude, whereas the wrong response will be one of greed, lust, contempt and arrogance. The right response, moreover, will always be coupled with the awareness of the divine that is inherent in the natural world as in Scripture, so that the inner eye of faith can use it as a vehicle for a deeper understanding of the spiritual realities. The created world is a gift of God, entrusted to the care of human persons so that it may be offered back to God by them as the priests of the created universe. In short the Fathers of the Church uphold a Eucharistic attitude to and use of the created world. The liturgical prayers of the Church also always praise God the Father as the creator and Lord of all.³² Sacramentality of the world is also very much emphasised by the modern theologians like Karl Rahner, H. U. Von Balthazar, T. Spidlick

²⁹ S. Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition", *Sobornost* 12 (1990), 140

³⁰ R. Murray, "The Image of God: Delegated and Responsible Authority", *Priests and People* 14 (2000), 49-54. See also S. Brock, "Humanity and the Natural World in the Syriac Tradition", *Sobornost* 12 (1990), 131-142. The Syriac patristic thinking is essentially in line with the traditional teaching of the Church that God the almighty is the creator of everything and is the owner of the created world; we are only the caretakers or custodians; the world is not a property of man but a gift of God for man. Thus man's attitude to and use of the natural world, which are to be governed by the right exercise of free will, is of fundamental importance for St. Ephrem.

³¹ M. Kadavil, "World as Sacrament: Ethical and Liturgical Response to Creation in St. Ephrem", 10.

³² In the Latin liturgy of Holy Eucharist, presenting the Eucharistic gifts on the Altar, the priest prays: Blessed are you, Lord God of all creation; for through your goodness, we have received the bread we offer you, fruit of the earth and work of human hands, it will become for us the bread of life...fruit of the vine and work of human hands, it will become our spiritual drink". In the Syro Malabar Holy Qurbana, this idea is very clear in the liturgical hymn of "Lord of all..." and in the second thanksgiving prayer (g'hanata) of the first and second Eucharistic prayers (anaphoras). This idea is also very clear in the divine praises of the Church, especially in the morning liturgy of hours.

and Bernard Haering³³ and also by the orthodox theologians like J. Zizioulas, A. Schmemmann, P. Eudokimov, C. Yannaras, etc.³⁴

Conclusion

This study makes it clear that ecology is an integral part of theology. There is a continuity of eco-theological insights, starting from the Sacred Scripture and passing through the Fathers of the Church, medieval and modern theologians reaching up to the contemporary teachings of the Church. The Fathers of the Church, though they lived centuries before, are still contributing to the present with their rich theological intuitions.

A contemplative and sacramental approach to the cosmos and to the human

person proposes a sound theology on ecology, which is a widely discussed theme in LS and among the Fathers of the Church. The created world is a magnificent book and a wonderful masterpiece of God, to be appreciated with the gaze of Jesus. Hence we need a solid eco-theology of shared human responsibility and stewardship for the environment as a sound response to the ecological crisis today for which LS constantly invites us. LS also challenges us for a wider understanding of ecology in the light of ecumenical, inter religious and inter cultural perspectives. In short, we can rightly say that human persons are the fellow travellers or wayfarers or sojourners upon this planet.



³³ See K. Rahner, *Theological Investigations*, Vol. 14, 161-184; H. U. VON BALTHASAR, *Herrlichkeit: Eine Theologie der Estetik* (Tübingen, 1961); T. ŠPIDLÍK, *The Spirituality of the Christian East*, 125-150; B. HÄRING, *Free and Faithful in Christ II*, 101-152, 167-208; Amala James, "Sacramentality of the World, Human Being and the Church: a Brief Sketch of Rahner's Approach", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 13 (2009), 105-123. K. Rahner writes: "The world is permeated by the grace of God...The world is constantly and ceaselessly possessed by grace from its innermost roots, from the innermost personal centre of the spiritual subject" (*Theological Investigations*, Vol. 14, p. 166)

³⁴ See, A. SCHMEMMANN, *Il mondo come sacramento* (Brescia, 1969); P. EVDOKIMOV, *Teologia della bellezza: L'arte dell'icona* (Roma, 1984); J. ZIZIOULAS, *Il creato come Eucaristia: Approccio teologico al problema dell'ecologia* (Magnano, 1994); C. YANNARAS, *La libertà dell'ethos*, 73-107, 139-178, 241-277.

CROSS OF CHRIST: “CAUSE OF ALL GOOD AND STRONG FORTRESS”

Fr. Naiju Jose Kalambukattu CMI

1. Introduction

Cross of Christ plays a significant role in the life of a disciple and proper discipleship lies in carrying one's Cross and following the Lord (Mt 16:24). The Cross is the Power of God (1 Cor 1:1-8). “I do not wish to take pride in anything except in the Cross of Christ Jesus our Lord. Through him the world has been crucified to me and I to the world” (Gal 6:14). The vision of Jesus' Cross as the supreme manifestation of God's inexplicable love comes to the central focus especially in Rom 5:6-11.

Different Church traditions celebrate the Cross of the Lord in different ways and each Church has her own version of the Cross. There are Greek Cross, Coptic Cross, Armenian Cross, Maronite Cross, Latin Cross, Andrew Cross ... etc. Though the form of the Cross and the devotion and the manner of veneration vary, it is sure that each tradition holds Cross as the significant symbol of salvation. Realizing Cross as the power of God, manifestation of His supreme love, cause of all good and strong fortress, the Thomas Christians hold it high in their lives.

They are great devotees of the Cross of Christ and the typical version of their cross is called St. Thomas Cross or *Mar Toma Sliba*. As this Cross has a significant position in the spiritual and social lives of St. Thomas Christians, this article is an attempt to explore its importance in their lives.

2. St. Thomas Christians and the Veneration of the Cross

Cross is an object of veneration in the families of St. Thomas Christians, and is a significant symbol in their liturgical setting. It is used for the processions, veneration and blessings in the liturgy. In connection with the feasts of parishes, Crosses have an important place especially during the processions, for there is a custom to carry gold and silver Crosses in their festal and funeral processions, and it is the Cross, that leads the processions. They used to adorn the Cross with precious metals, because they consider the Cross the symbol of their victory. In short, the “St. Thomas Christians looked at Cross both as an object of devotion and as an identity-imprinting symbol.”¹

¹P. Malekandathil, “Popular Devotions and Folk Religious Practices among the St. Thomas Christians: A Historical Analysis”, *The Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 17, 4 (October-December 2006), 31.

Until the Synod of Diamper (1599), the St. Thomas Christians had only Crosses without the figure of the crucified Lord and their Churches were devoid of statues. The external walls of their ancient churches were decorated with Crosses similar to the miraculous Cross of Mylapore.² Each church of Malabar had Crosses of gold, silver, wood and granite, and a copy of the Scripture, bound and decorated with gold, silver and diamond.³ It shows that the Scripture and the Cross were the most precious treasures of the Thomas Christians.

There were three different types of Crosses among the Thomas Christians. The first type is the Pahlavi⁴-inscribed Cross or St. Thomas Cross kept in the churches for veneration. The second type is the huge

granite Cross erected in front of their churches⁵. Due to the greater visibility the granite stone Cross outside the churches had more appeal to the believers. As Malekandathil expounds, "Devotees used to light the oil lamps of the Crosses (*vilakkumadams*) all through the day but frequently during the night, either to get their wishes fulfilled or to express their gratitude for the favours already received."⁶ The open air granite Cross with oil lamps is a symbol of faith in Christ, the Light of the world.⁷ The Crosses with lighted lamps all throughout night provided fire for the ordinary people, and from these lights, the poor used to carry fire for the use at home.⁸ The local belief was that the one who lights a lamp would be protected and safeguarded for day and night.⁹ Third type is

² L. Arangassery, "Sacramentals (Subsidiary Mysteries) and Devotions among Thomas Christians", in A. Mekkattukunnel, ed., *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 2012, 416.

³ Vincenzo Maria, *Il Viaggio all' Indie Orientali, (Libro Secondo)*, Roma, 1672, 2.

⁴ Scholars have the opinion that the character around the edge of the cross is from Pahlavi language, and for the different versions of translations see: O. Vazhuthanappally, "A Historico-Archaeological Site Study and Research on Mar Thoma Sliva", *Christian Orient* 10, 2 (June 1989), 83-84.

⁵ M. Anikuzhikattil, "Distinctive Traits of Eastern Liturgies", in T. Mannoorampampil, ed., *Theological Dimensions of Christian Orient*, Kottayam 2005, 63.

⁶ P. Malekandathil, "Popular Devotions and Folk Religious Practices", 32.

⁷ J. Vazhuthanappally, "The Adoration of Mar Sliba among the Palaeo-Christians in India", in A. Mekkattukunnel, ed., *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 2012, 361. Malekandam narrates the devotional practice: "The crawling on knees around the Cross as part of the penitential procession is undertaken from the main entrance of the church. In this crawling procession around the Cross, both the Christian and the marginalized particularly the beneficiaries of the light and fire provided by the Cross, take part at least annually and with a view to fulfilling a pledge that they take in times of crisis and difficulties. The pain and suffering that they feel due to crawling on knees around the Crosses, through the rough surface are exhorted to be linked with the suffering of Jesus on the Cross by which process they imbibe strength and courage to face the oddities of life in the days to come". P. Malekandathil, "Popular Devotions and Folk Religious Practices", 33.

⁸ P. Malekandathil, "Common Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians", *The Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 19, 3 (July-September 2008), 9.

⁹ J. Vazhuthanappally, "The Adoration of Mar Sliba", 361.

the small Crosses kept in the tied hair locks (*kudumi*) of men.¹⁰ The Thomas Christians used to insert small Crosses in their hair locks prior to the introduction of scapular in Malabar. It was done as a distinguishing sign of their Christian identity and an object of devotion.¹¹ The married women always wore the *tali/minnu* with a Cross of 21 minute beads.

2.1. St. Thomas Cross and Its Symbolism

St. Thomas Christians consider the Cross, not only mere an instrument of the passion of Christ but also as a sign of His victory over death and sin. Hence they prefer the Cross without the figure of the Lord, and St. Thomas Cross is without the dying figure of Jesus Christ,¹² and it is an expression of resurrection theology¹³. In imitation of the empty tomb, which has become the womb of new life, the Cross without the figure of Jesus symbolizes the resurrection of Jesus and signifies the Risen Lord. "Why do you seek

the living one among the dead? He is not here, but has risen" (Lk 24:5-6). Mannoorampampil explains, "The Cross without the figure of the Lord reveals fully the mystery of salvation. It reveals the three divine persons of the Holy Trinity, the work of creation by the Father, redemption by the Son, sanctification by the Holy Spirit, the Church which is the continuation of Christ the Word of God which builds up the Church, the Sacraments which are the acts of the Church and the final glorification of the Church."¹⁴ Badger further explains:

Now the great foundation of Christianity is the confession that through the Cross renewal and universal salvation were obtained for all, and that Cross which we use is the same sign of our Lord as is to appear in the heavens before His coming, as He himself has foretold. When, therefore, we look upon this emblem of our salvation, we conceive as though we were beholding our SAVIOUR

¹⁰ The Thomas Christians had the practice of growing their hair and beard. The hair was tied together with a string or hair locks as to form a *kudumi* into which they used to insert a small cross of gold or silver. This was a practice till the eighteenth century. The Cross inserted in the *kudumi* served as a visible sign to distinguish themselves from the Nair-Hindu brethren who had the same type of dress as that of the Thomas Christians. Cfr. P. Malekandathil, "Common Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians", 9-10.

¹¹ L. Arangassery, "Sacramentals (Subsidiary Mysteries) and Devotions", 416.

¹² The Cross (*Sliba*) is different from the 'crucifix', which has the dying figure of the Lord. The crucifix with the image of Christ was introduced in the Catholic Church by the Franciscans through their preaching of the passion and death of the Lord for the conversion of people. The devotion to the crucifix originated in the Western Church probably in the 6th Century. Now the crucifix is popular in the Western Church but the Eastern Churches venerate the Cross (*Sliba*) without the figure of the Lord emphasizing more as a symbol of the mystery of Christ's resurrection than death. Cfr. L. Arangassery, "The Life-Giving Cross: A Foundational Mystery and a Sacramental in the East", *Ephrem's Theological Journal* 16, 1 (March 2012) 14-15.

¹³ M. Vellanickal, "The Syro-Malabar Church as an Individual Church", in T. Mannoorampampil, ed., *Theological Dimensions of Christian Orient*, Kottayam 2005, 139.

¹⁴ T. Mannoorampampil, "Devotion to the Cross in the Syro-Malabar Church", in P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Folly of the Cross*, Bangalore - Kottayam 2000, 136-137.

outstretched upon it for the remission of our sins, and for the renewal of all creation. Hence we offer a fervent and Eucharistic worship, not to the fashioned matter of the Cross; but to Him whom we figure as upon it, and above all to GOD, who gave His SON to be a Cross [i.e. crucified] for us, through whose crucifixion He wrought out renewal and redemption for us, and through Whom He gives to such as are worthy everlasting life in the kingdom of heaven.¹⁵

St. Thomas Cross is the perfect symbol of death, life and resurrection of the Lord.¹⁶ "It denotes the tree of life, the stem of Jesse, the staff of comfort (Holy Spirit), the Ark of Noah (Church), the sign of Jesus' life, death and resurrection and that of Christian perfection-the sum total of the Old and New Testaments."¹⁷

The salient features of St. Thomas Cross are the three steps, the lotus/leaves, Cross with

its four ends as blooming buds/fruits and the descending dove. Its original setting has two pillars on the sides connected with an arch above.

2.1.1. Steps

The three steps at the bottom of the St. Thomas Cross have symbolic meaning and convey a theology.¹⁸ The Jewish people thought to climb heaven by means of steps/ladder and it is symbolized by Jacob's dream at Bethel.¹⁹ "While Jacob was sleeping, he had a dream in which a ladder stood on the earth with its top reaching to heaven and on it were angels of God going up and coming down" (Gen 28:12). The Egyptians also considered the steps symbolic of one's ascension to heaven.²⁰ Therefore, the steps are ladder to heaven.

There are varieties of Crosses with three steps and in general these steps of the Crosses are the symbolic steps of Calvary.²¹ So also

¹⁵ G.P. Badger, *Nestorians and Their Rituals. With the Narrative of A Mission to Mesopotamia and Coordistan in 1842-1844*, vol. 2, London 1987, 414.

¹⁶ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of Mar Thoma Sliba*, Kottayam 1990, 45; V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana: The Eucharistic Celebration of the Chaldeo-Indian Church*, Kottayam 1998, 56-57.

¹⁷ M.T. Antony, "Saint Thomas Cross: A Religio-Cultural Logo of Saint Thomas Christians", in P. Kochappilly, G. Pallikunnel and J.V. Kureethara, ed., *The Way of Life*, Kottayam 2011, 266.

¹⁸ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 72-73.

¹⁹ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 73. The Jerusalem Temple had many steps: "There were seven steps up to it and its porch was at the inner end" (Ez 40:22). "And it had seven steps up to it; its entrance was at the inner end and had palm-tree decorations on its pillars, one on each side" (Ez 40:26). "The entrance gave on to the outer court. It had palm trees on its pillars, each side, and eight steps leading up to it" (40:31). "Its Porch gave on to the outer court. There were palm trees on its pillars on either side, and eight steps leading up to it" (40:34). "The Hall was twenty cubits by twelve cubits. There were ten steps leading up to it" (Ez 40:49).

²⁰ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 73.

²¹ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 75.

the three steps of the St. Thomas Cross signify either heaven or Calvary.²² The three steps of the St. Thomas Cross lead to the Cross of Jesus as the steps of Calvary lead to the Cross of Jesus and His crucifixion.²³ To phrase differently, the steps are the way to reach the crucified one. Etymologically, the Syriac word *Sliba* signifies the 'crucified one', and the *Sliba* symbolizes the crucified Lord²⁴. Therefore, "Cross is called *Mar Sleevea* signifying that it is the personification of the crucified and resurrected Christ."²⁵

The steps are the symbolic representation of the Church founded on Calvary.²⁶ Most of the ancient churches of Thomas Christians are on hills and have many steps to reach them. In their churches the liturgy of the Word is celebrated at the Calvary in the *Bema*. It is significant that *Bema* which has three steps is the symbol of earthly Jerusalem and the table on it is the Calvary and it is the ladder to heaven.²⁷ Therefore the Calvary is the source of the ecclesial life from where the Word of God is proclaimed for the nourishment of Christian life. In sum,

besides being a symbol of ladder to heaven, steps to Calvary and way to the Crucified, the steps of the St. Thomas Cross, have an ecclesial dimension as they represent the Holy Church.²⁸

2.1.2. Lotus/Leaves

The Lotus-like/leaf-like part is very conspicuous in the St. Thomas Cross. Lotus has been considered a symbol of Buddhism or the seat of Buddha²⁹, and it turned out to be the symbol of India due to the influence of Buddhism during the reign of Emperor Asoka. In various art forms, many Indian deities are depicted on the lotus. The Cross erected on lotus is a living symbol of faith in the risen Lord proclaimed and established in India.³⁰

Lotus as a small flower, from the mud at the bottom of a pond, slowly grows up towards the light at the surface of the water, and when it reaches the surface of the water, it begins to blossom and turns into a beautiful flower. Thus it is a symbol of both the struggles of life and the purity.³¹ The Cross

²²J. Vazhuthanapally, *Archeology of Mar Sliba*, Kottayam 1990, 139; V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 56-58.

²³J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 83.

²⁴The Syriac word *sliba* is the passive participle of the verb *slb*, which mean 'the crucified' in the masculine gender. C. Payngot, "The Cross in the Chaldean Tradition", *Christian Orient* 2, 3 (July-September 1981), 107; M. Anikuzhikattil, "Distinctive Traits of Eastern Liturgies", 63.

²⁵T. Mannooramparambil, "Popular Piety in the Syro-Malabar Church", *The Journal of St. Thomas Christians* 17, 4 (October-December, 2006), 49.

²⁶J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 127.

²⁷V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 145.

²⁸J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 127-128.

²⁹T. Kariyilakulam, "St. Thomas Cross-Sacred Symbol of Syrian Christian Spirituality", *Christian Orient* 31, 3 (September 2010), 168.

³⁰V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 56.

³¹M.T. Antony, "Saint Thomas Cross", 244.

depicted on the lotus inspires and invites everyone to be pure and holy amidst the struggles of life. They are reminded to look towards the Risen Lord who gained victory over suffering, sin, death and satan. Cross on the lotus signifies the resurrection of the Lord and His victory over sin.³²

The Cross on a lotus is a symbol of inculturation. As Pallath rightly captures, "St. Thomas Cross is the most ancient indianized Christian symbol, which testifies to the inculturation of the Christian faith on Indian soil."³³ This Cross is the common patrimony of all the Churches in India.³⁴ It is highly decorative and Indian in its frame. Comparing with Indian art, M.T. Antony states that St. Thomas Cross is an inculturated Christian monument of Thomas Christians.³⁵ Even the Hindu brethren consider this as a unifying element because there is no figure of the crucified One.³⁶

The decorative part above the steps also could be explained as leaves. Jesus was crucified on a Cross made of wood of a tree with leaves. Since Cross is the tree of life, it is probable to explain the decorative part as leaves of the life-giving tree. The tree of life in the Paradise is a type of the Cross of Christ. "Yahweh God caused to grow from

the ground every kind of tree that is pleasing to see and good to eat, also the *tree of Life* in the middle of the garden and the tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil" (Gen 2:9). The Book of Revelation has further explanation, "In the middle of the city, on both sides of the river are the *trees of life* producing fruit twelve times, once each month, the *leaves* of which are for *healing* the nations" (Rev 22:2). Cross is the symbol of the tree of life in the Paradise and the leaves are of the tree of life.

The leaves of the St. Thomas Cross belongs to the created work of God the Father who provides everything to the humans (Ps 8:19; Prov 8:22; Job 38:4; Is 40:12), and therefore, it is also the symbol of God the Father. The three steps together with the lotus/leaves symbolize the created world and it points to God the Father, the Creator. The tree of life in the creation account is the nucleus of the First/Old Testament, and so the leaves of the Cross represent the FT/OT. In sum, the leaves-like part of the Cross speaks about the biblical dimension of the St. Thomas Cross.

The bitter water of Marah was made sweet by throwing a piece of *wood* into it (Ex 15:25). The healing, reconciling and saving

³² M.T. Antony, "Saint Thomas Cross", 244.

³³ P. Pallath, "The Syro-Malabar Church and Inculturation", *Ephrem's Theolocical Journal* 4, 2 (October 2000), 160; Id, *The Eucharistic Liturgy of the St. Thomas Christians and the Synod of Diamper*, Kottayam 2008, 205.

³⁴ J. Vazhuthanappally, "Indian Christian Architecture," in P. Kochappilly, G. Pallikunnel and J.V. Kureethara, ed., *The Way of Life*, Kottayam 2011, 278.

³⁵ M.T. Antony, "Saint Thomas Cross", 246.

³⁶ J. Vazhuthanappally, "Indian Christian Architecture", 278.

power of the tree of life is seen on the Cross. Among the St. Thomas Christians there existed a custom that when a priest visited the sick for anointing, he used to bless a piece of palm leaf with verses of the sacred Scripture written on it, and place it on the body of the sick.³⁷ During Christmas and Easter they also used to decorate their churches spreading leaves.

2.1.3. Cross

The four tips of the Cross designed like the blooming buds symbolize the new life restored to humanity by the resurrection of the Lord.³⁸ This Cross depicted with blooming buds as a blossoming tree symbolizes more the risen Christ of new life than the crucified Christ of vicarious suffering, for life sprouts on the Cross. Thus St. Thomas Cross, a flowering Cross, a tree of life signifies the risen Lord, the iconic symbol of new life and new light.³⁹ As Beggiani captures, the cross being a reconciler, it serves as a bridge between death and new life because the cross as tree overcomes the sin that came through the tree in paradise.⁴⁰ Flowering or glorious Cross is also a symbol which expresses the real value of Christian suffering. Those who suffer with Jesus will also be raised with him in order to share his glorious life.

Reflecting on the symbolism of the wood as a figure of the cross, Ephrem sees the ark of Noah as symbol of the cross, of the church and of baptism. In *Hymn on Faith* 49, he describes how the ark symbolized the cross and the “rudder of its pilot who came to construct the church on the waters”⁴¹. Since this Cross is the tree of life, its four tips could also be understood as fruits.⁴² These are the fruits of the Cross, the life giving tree. Therefore, this Cross invites the faithful to remain in the tree of life to produce abundant fruits. “As long as you remain in me and I in you, you bear much fruit; but apart from me you can do nothing” (Jn 15:5).

This Cross is a symbol of the Lord who is life in its fullness, and His Gospel of “abundance of life” (Jn 10:10; Jn 14:6). St. Thomas Cross summarizes the whole life of Jesus and the whole history of salvation in the Second/New Testament. Thus this Cross reveals the Christological dimension of redemption.

2.1.4. Dove

Dove is the symbol of the Holy Spirit as per the Gospel testimonies (Mt 3:16). The descending dove on the St. Thomas Cross is identified as the Holy Spirit, and the Holy Spirit that descends upon the Cross is a symbol of

³⁷ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 92.

³⁸ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 57.

³⁹ A. Kalliath, “Christian Mission as New Life in Jesus”, *Asian Horizons* 5, 1 (March 2011), 68.

⁴⁰ S.J. Beggiani, *Early Syriac Theology with Special Reference to the Maronite Tradition*, rev. edn., Washington D.C. 2014, 59.

⁴¹ E. BECK, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Fide*, CSCO 154, 155, Scr. Syr. Tom., 73, Louvain 1955, 155/132.

⁴² J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 130.

resurrection. It is through the Holy Spirit that Jesus was raised from the dead; and it is the same Spirit who is at work in the resurrection of human beings. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit that dwells in you" (Rom 8:11).

The Spirit distributes the fruit of redemption, unites the Christians and guides the Church. The descending position of the dove on the St. Thomas Cross is a constant reminder of the role of the Holy Spirit in the creation (Gen 1:2), in the conception and incarnation as the "Power of the Highest" (Lk 1:35), in the resurrection of Jesus and for the good functioning of the Church. "When he, the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into the whole truth" (Jn 16:13). In sum, the Spirit will guide us to the deeper comprehension of the divine mystery of the Cross and the descending dove alludes to the pneumatological dimension of the St. Thomas Cross.⁴³

In short, St. Thomas Cross is basically Trinitarian. It is a unique symbol which symbolizes the Trinity: God the Father, the Resurrected Son and the Holy Spirit. As a symbol of the Holy Spirit it is kept on the

left side of the Altar.⁴⁴ The St. Thomas Cross placed at the Eastern wall of the *madbha* symbolizes the risen and glorified Christ, and the Triune God in Heaven. It is also a symbolic representation of the Church on earth, God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit.⁴⁵

St. Thomas Cross is rooted in the Holy Scripture and apostolic tradition. As Kaniarakath says, "The St. Thomas Cross invites every Christian to the profound truth of the Cross which leads to glory. The call of the Apostle Thomas, 'Let us go that we may die with him' becomes meaningful here."⁴⁶ St. Thomas Cross evokes the call of St. Thomas to the fellow disciples to 'go to Judea' with Jesus, i.e., to walk with Him, and to die and rise with Him (Jn 11:1-16). Cross is identified with Jesus Christ, the Way to the Father (Jn 14:5-7) and it represents the sufferings, victory and glorification of Jesus.⁴⁷ "Mar Sliba is considered the symbol of death, life and resurrection."⁴⁸ As it is a supreme symbol of the victory of the risen Lord and as it represents the risen Lord himself, St. Thomas Cross persuades one to renew one's faith in Jesus, the Lord and God. Therefore, it is a unique and lofty symbol of *Mar Toma Margam* and one's commitment to Christ.

⁴³ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 129.

⁴⁴ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 141.

⁴⁵ J. Vazhuthanapally, "Indian Christian Architecture", 277.

⁴⁶ G. Kaniarakath, "Through *Staurós* to *Dóxa*: A Biblical Understanding of the Cross", in P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Folly of the Cross*, Bangalore - Kottayam 2000, 15-16.

⁴⁷ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 45.

⁴⁸ J. Vazhuthanapally, *The Biblical and Archaeological Foundations of the Mar Thoma Sliba*, 45.

It is a unique and symbolic Cross of the St. Thomas Christians of India. As Kochappilly states, “*Mar Toma Sliba* is the window through which to marvel at the magnificent mystery of Christ -death and resurrection- rooted in the land of India and bearing the fruit of life by the work of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁹ Thus St. Thomas Cross remains a unique symbol that proclaims the acceptance of Jesus Christ, who accomplished the human salvation through his death and resurrection.⁵⁰

In sum, as mentioned above, St. Thomas Cross has ecclesiological, theological, Scriptural, Christological, pneumatological and apostolic dimensions. Therefore, it is a theological or *kerygmatic* Cross. It is the Christian faith in symbol. It symbolizes the beautiful blending of the crucified and the risen Lord. As Arangassery expounds, “the St. Thomas Cross, with its artistic splendor and theological depth, is now the icon of the Ecclesial identity of Thomas Christians as well as a Mystery Symbol”.⁵¹

2.2. Feast of St. Thomas Cross

In the sixteenth century, as the western missionaries were digging the ground to reconstruct the chapel on St. Thomas Mount,

Mylapore, India, they happened to come across a sixth Century Pahlavi inscribed Cross on March 23, 1547. When the construction was over, they fixed it to the rear wall of the main altar at the eastern end and it remains there to the present day. This Cross sweated blood at the proclamation of the Gospel during the Holy *Qurbana* on December 18, 1558. According to the testimony of the missionaries, the miracle of sweating blood was repeated for several years on the same date and in the same manner.⁵² They informed the Pope of this miracle and obtained permission from him to celebrate December 18 as the feast of the apparition of the Mylapore Cross.⁵³ Due to the association traditionally attributed to St. Thomas and the sweating of blood the Pahlavi inscribed Crosses received a great amount of acceptability and became an important object of devotion. The sweating of blood earned this Cross an epithet of “Miraculous Cross.”⁵⁴

2.3. Ornaments with the Cross

St. Thomas Christians have ornaments with Cross. A Cross of 21 minute beads distinguishes the Christian *tali/minnu* from Brahmin one. Married women would never take off the *tali* from their necks, for it is the

⁴⁹ P. Kochappilly, “*Mar Toma Margam: A Theology of the Way*”, in P. Kochappilly, G. Pallikunnel and J.V. Kureethara, ed., *The Way of Life*, Kottayam 2011, 51.

⁵⁰ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 56-58.

⁵¹ L. Arangassery, *Subsidiary Mysteries in the East. An Introduction to the Sacramentality of the Mysteries*, Kottayam 2014, 104.

⁵² “*Quella Croce ogn’anno, il decimo ottavo di Dicembre, giorno nel quale fu ferito l’Apostolo a morte, cominciando si l’Euangelio della Messa cantata, si fa oscura...dove cadettero le goccioline del sangue...*” Cfr. Vincenzo Maria, *Il Viaggio all’Indie Orientali*, 144.

⁵³ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 56-57; L. Arangassery, *Subsidiary Mysteries in the East*, 101.

⁵⁴ P. Malekandathil, “Popular Devotions and Folk Religious Practices”, 32.

sign of their faithfulness in married life and the Cross on it is a source of power and strength in the struggles of life. As mentioned above, men used to wear Cross on their tuft (*kudumi*) to manifest their Christian identity and as an object of devotion.⁵⁵

2.4. Cross in the Most Solemn Eucharistic Celebration

There are three forms of the Holy *Qurbana* of the St. Thomas Christians: The Most Solemn Form known as *Raza*, the Solemn Form and the Simple Form.⁵⁶ In all these three forms of the Holy *Qurbana* and all other liturgical celebrations, St. Thomas Cross is an essential symbol.

St. Thomas Cross placed at the left side of the altar symbolizes the Holy Spirit.⁵⁷ It is venerated through pious touch or kiss, carried in processions and hymns are sung in praise of the Cross. Thus the liturgy has extensive use of the symbol of the Cross. It is absolutely fallacious to present any eastern liturgy as putting the Cross in less relief than western devotion. As Bouyer rightly expounds, "What is true is that it never forgets the goal of the cross, i.e., the Resurrection, the Resurrection

with Jesus of the entire Mystical Body, led by Him from the depth of hell to the superior heaven, up to the luminous and vivifying presence of the invisible God."⁵⁸

From early centuries on empty tomb and empty Cross i.e., Cross without the figure of the Lord were considered important symbols of the Risen Lord.⁵⁹ The altar is the sepulcher of the Lord. The farewell prayer said by the priest at the end of the Holy *Qurbana* attests to this fact. Since the empty tomb is the symbol of resurrection, Church permits only the symbols of resurrection on the altar.

The Cross (*Sliba*) is the central mystery celebrated on the *bema*. "The liturgy on the *bema* is the commemoration of the earthly economy of Christ that climaxes in the death on the Cross and the burial."⁶⁰ The theology of the Cross expounds the meaning of suffering in its Christian sense. "Was it not necessary that the Messiah should suffer these things and enter into his glory?" (Lk 24:26). Suffering has a positive and saving dimension because of the living and eschatological Cross of Christ. The Divine Liturgy gives the

⁵⁵ Vincenzo Maria, *Il Viaggio all' Indie Orientali*, 144, 152; P. Malekandathil, "Popular Devotions and Folk Religious Practices", 33.

⁵⁶ The various factors like the celebrant, the sacred rites, the Scriptural readings, the chants, the use of incense etc. are the basis of these varying degrees of solemnity. Cfr. "General Instructions Regarding the Order for the *Qurbana* of the Syro-Malabar Church", *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana, The Order of Raza*, Trivandrum 1989, ix.

⁵⁷ The Gospel Lectionary is placed at the right side and the St. Thomas Cross on the left side of the altar. Enthroning the Gospel Lectionary at the right side of the altar, the St. Thomas Christians proclaim in action that Jesus ascended to heaven and sits at the right hand of His Father. The St. Thomas Cross enthroned at the left side of the altar represents the Holy Spirit. Cfr. V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 140-141.

⁵⁸ L. Bouyer, "Western Catholics and the Byzantine Liturgy", *Diakonia* 7, 1 (1972), 18.

⁵⁹ J. Vazhuthanappally, *Kurishinte Bhoshatham*, Changanassery 1998, 18-19.

⁶⁰ L. Arangassery, "The Life-Giving Cross", 15.

humans hope and consolation showing that the Cross leads to victory and salvation.⁶¹

Here we look into the veneration of the Cross in the most solemn form of the Eucharistic celebration (*Raṣṣa*). There are processions with the Cross, rite of kissing the Cross and signing of the Cross.

2.4.1. Processions with the Cross

Cross is essential in all the liturgical processions of the St. Thomas Christians. There are three processions with Cross in the most solemn eucharistic celebration (*Raṣṣa*) of Syro-Malabar Church.

2.4.1.1. Entrance Procession with the Cross

The Cross has a significant place during the entrance (first) procession. The instruction given in the *taksa* is as follows, “The celebrant... enters the sanctuary in procession accompanied by the archdeacon, deacons and other ministers, each wearing sacred vestments appropriate to him. In the procession are to be borne a Cross, a censer, candles and the Gospel... The first deacon who carries the

Cross places it on the credence in the middle of the Bema with two candles one on either side.”⁶² This procession from sanctuary to *bema* is a movement from heavenly Jerusalem to the earthly Jerusalem, for the sanctuary is a symbol of heaven and the *baykala* is the symbol of the earth. The Cross and the Gospel placed on the *bema* symbolize the Lord seated among the disciples and teaching them.⁶³ For Timothy II, “the proceeding of the cross outside signifies the fact that our Lord went out to the wilderness, and the fight he made with the accuser. Its being set on the bema shows the sitting of our Lord with his disciples while he was preaching.”⁶⁴ The Cross coming out of the sanctuary represents Jesus coming to his people. The procession of the Cross from the sanctuary to the *bema* symbolises the coming of the Lord from heaven, his manifestation and ministry.⁶⁵

2.4.1.2. Procession with the Cross and the Gospel to the Bema

The celebrant accompanied by the archdeacon and by those who carry candles, thurifer and Cross goes up to the altar and

⁶¹ J. Puthiaparampil, “Spiritual Heritage and Ascetic Practices in the Life of St Thomas Christians”, in A. Mekkattukunnel, ed., *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 2012, 444.

⁶² Cfr. *The Syro-Malabar Qurbana, The Order of Raza*, 1.

⁶³ G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 39-40, S.P. Brock, intr. & trans. “Gabriel of Qatar’s Commentary on the Liturgy”, *Hugoye. Journal of Syriac Studies* 6, 2 (2003), <http://syrocom.cua.edu/Hugoye/vol6no2Brock.html> (22.10.2014).

⁶⁴ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, J. Kochuparampil, trans., *The Mystery of the Eucharist: Syriac Critical Text, Translation and Studies of the Chapter “On the Mysteries of the Body and Blood” from The Book of the Seven Causes of the Mysteries of the Church by Catholicos-Patriarch Timothy II (1218-1332)*, Excerpta ex Dissertatione ad Doctoratum, Romae 2000, 57.

⁶⁵ P. Maniyattu, “The Meaning of Mission and Proclamation in the East Syrian Qurbana: A Liturgical Theology of Mission”, *Ephrem’s Theological Journal* 3, 1 (March 1999) 49-50.

takes the Gospel placed at the right side of the altar and kisses it and extends it to be kissed by the other ministers while the first deacon intones the *Onithad'Evangelion*. After placing the Gospel back on the altar, the celebrant and the archdeacon take their seats; meanwhile the deacons, facing the people at the entrance of the sanctuary, alternate the *Turgama* of the Gospel with the choir. At the end of *Turgama*, the celebrant takes the Gospel from the altar holding it to his forehead, goes down to the *bema* in procession with archdeacon and the ministers who carry the Cross and two lighted candles and incense. According to Gabriel Qatraya, the Gospel procession is "a symbol of the procession with which our Lord entered Jerusalem"⁶⁶ and the chanting of the Gospel represents the teaching of the Lord. For George of Arbel, the procession of the Gospel is the manifestation of the Lord at Jordan, and its chanting symbolizes His teaching and dispensation after baptism.⁶⁷ The Gospel in procession with the Cross symbolizes the presence of the Lord in body and soul. It is a "symbol of the humanity of our Lord which existed in body and soul"⁶⁸, the Cross as the symbol of body and the Gospel as the symbol of soul.⁶⁹ According to Bar Zo'bi, "The procession of the cross

of light and the gospel symbolizes the humanity of our Lord, His body and soul. The cross denotes the body which was crucified on the wood and the gospel symbolizes His intelligent soul."⁷⁰

The two lights which accompany the Cross in the procession are seen as the sign of the two Testaments, the OT and NT.⁷¹ The Cross symbolizes the presence of Christ among the people celebrating the redemption and the incense symbolizes the sweetness of Christ.⁷² During the chanting of the Gospel the minister who carries the Cross stands on the right side of the celebrant. After the chanting, the Gospel, the Cross and the candles are placed on the *bema*.

2.4.1.3. Procession with the Cross and the Gospel to the Sanctuary

The archdeacon takes the Cross and hands it over to the celebrant, who in turn, passes it to the first deacon. Then the celebrant takes the Gospel and gives it to the second deacon. The deacons go up to the altar and stand facing each other. After the recitation of the prayer of imposition by the celebrant and the rite of dismissal, the Cross and the Gospel are exchanged by the deacons. The

⁶⁶ G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 24.

⁶⁷ George of Arbel, *A Commentary on the Mass by the Nestorian George, Bishop of Mosul and Arbel*, R.H. Connolly, trans., R. Matheus, ed., Kottayam 2000, 45. 55.

⁶⁸ G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 23.

⁶⁹ G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 23.

⁷⁰ J. Bar Zo'bi, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*, T. Mannoorampampil, trans., Kottayam 1992, 29.

⁷¹ D. Webb, "The Mimra on the Interpretation of the Mysteries by Rabban Johannan Bar Zo'obi, and its Symbolism", *Le Museon* 88, 3-4 (1975), 308; P. Yousif, "The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Assyro-Chadean Church", in J. Madey, ed., *The Eucharistic Liturgy in the Christian East*, Kottayam, 1983, 202.

⁷² P. Yousif, "The Divine Liturgy According to the Rite of the Assyro-Chadean Church", 202.

first deacon after kissing the Gospel receives it from the second deacon. Then the second deacon after kissing the Cross receives it from the first deacon. They place the Gospel and the Cross on the altar.

The Cross and the Gospel are taken from the *bema* to the sanctuary without any solemnity. The removal of the Cross and the Gospel from the *bema* symbolizes the arrest of our Lord.⁷³ Abdiso also expounds the taking down of the Cross and the Gospel from the *bema* without solemn procession as an indication of the seizure of Jesus and leading him to be crucified when none of his disciples was with him.⁷⁴ Here the liturgical assembly commemorates the last events in the earthly life of Jesus as being caught and led to be crucified. No disciples except John followed him in his last journey. "The guards and the soldiers, with their commander, seized Jesus and bound Him" (Jn 18:12). "When they had finished mocking him, they pulled off the purple cloak and dressed him in his own clothes again, and led him out to be crucified" (Mt 27:31). For Timothy II, the giving of the Cross and Gospel to the deacon by the priest is similar to our Lord's being led to where he was crucified, and to Simeon of Cyrene's

carrying His cross.⁷⁵ The taking of the Cross and the Gospel into the sanctuary represents also the ascension of Christ.⁷⁶

The setting up of the Cross at the threshold of the sanctuary is the symbol of the crucifixion of the Lord on the Cross and the separation of the Cross from the Gospel signifies the mystery of the separation of the soul of our Lord from His body.⁷⁷ The separation of the Cross from the Gospel at the door of the sanctuary, with the Cross standing on the right side and the Gospel on the left is a symbol of the separation of the soul of our Lord from his body when the soul entered paradise but the body remained on earth (Lk 23:42-43).⁷⁸ Here we commemorate and celebrate the mystery of the crucifixion, the separation of the soul from the body, and the entry in the Paradise of the Lord symbolically.⁷⁹

2.4.2. Rite of Veneration of the Cross

The rite of veneration of the Cross begins after the priestly prayer that follows the Psalmody: "Before the awesome *bema* of your majesty and sublime throne of your divinity...we kneel in fear and worship in awe and confess and glorify you without

⁷³ G. Qatraya, *Pithakanmarude Kudashabhashyangal: Homilies and Interpretations on the Holy Qurbana*, T. Mannoorampampil, ed. & trans., Kottayam 1992, 12; J. Bar Zo'bi, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*, 32.

⁷⁴ Abdisho, *Pithakanmarude Kudashabhashyangal: Interpretation of the Mysteries*, T. Mannoorampampil, ed. & trans., Kottayam 1992, 32-33.

⁷⁵ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 61.

⁷⁶ T. Mannoorampampil, *Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Qurbana Oru Padanam*, vol. 1, Kottayam 1990, 313.

⁷⁷ G. Qatraya, *Pithakanmarude Kudashabhashyangal*, 12-13; J. Bar Zo'bi, *Explanation of the Divine Mysteries*, 33.

⁷⁸ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 61.

⁷⁹ G. Qatraya, *Pithakanmarude Kudashabhashyangal*, 13.

intermission at all times, Lord of all, Father, Son and Holy Spirit for ever." The archdeacon takes the Cross and gives it to the celebrant who receives it, kisses it and extends it to be kissed by the archdeacon, deacons, ministers and the faithful. The *Onitha d'Qanke*, which is a variable hymn during the kissing of the Cross, shows the spiritual significance of the devotion to the Cross, the symbol of the victory of the Lord.⁸⁰ The anthem praises the Cross, as the means of human salvation. "The Cross that has been the cause of our good and by which our mortal humanity was set free, be for us, O Lord, a strong fortress, and by this Cross we shall overcome the wicked one and all his devices." According to Gabriel Qatraya it is a symbol of the praises of the heavenly hosts to the Lord or the praise of Christ as Lamb of God (Jn 1:29) by John the Baptist.⁸¹ For George of Arbel, it is the coming down of the Word of God from heaven, his incarnation and coming to Jerusalem to fulfill the dispensation.⁸² For Timothy II, *Onitha d'qanke* signifies the praise of the shepherds and the offerings of the Magi and the words of John, "This is the Lamb of God..."⁸³ Timothy II explains the carrying of the Cross as the carrying of our Lord by Simeon the old man, when he said:

"Behold I have seen your mercy, release your servant"⁸⁴ (Lk 2:30). The hymn is sung till the kissing of the Cross is over. Then the first deacon takes the Cross back to the *bema*.

The rite of veneration of the Cross shows the undeniable relationship between the Eucharistic sacrifice and the Cross.⁸⁵ During this rite the assembly meditates on the message of the Cross of Christ. "If you wish to be a follower of mine, deny yourself and take up your Cross each day and follow me" (Lk 9:23). "The language of the Cross remains nonsense for those who are lost. Yet for us who are saved, it is the power of God" (1 Cor 1:1-18). "In reality, the foolishness of God is wiser than humans, and weakness of God is stronger than humans" (1 Cor 1:18-25). "He cancelled the record of our debts, those regulations which accused us, He did away with all that and nailed it to the Cross" (Col 2:14). "For me, I do not wish to take pride in anything except in the Cross of Christ Jesus our Lord. Through him the world has been crucified to me and I to the world" (Gal 6:14). "I am crucified with Christ. It is no longer me, Christ Lives in me..." (Gal 2:19-20). "Those who belong to Christ have crucified the flesh with its vices and desires" (Gal 5:24). Thus Cross signifies Christ and

⁸⁰ R.H. Connolly, ed. & trans., *Anonymi Auctoris Expositio Officiorum Ecclesiae Georgio Arbelensi vulgo Adscripta* 2, CSCO, Scr. Syr. Tom. 92, Romae 1915, 10.

⁸¹ G. Qatraya, *Commentary on the Liturgy*, no. 7.

⁸² George of Arbel, *A Commentary on the Mass by the Nestorian George*, 33.

⁸³ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 56.

⁸⁴ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 56.

⁸⁵ T. Mannooramparampil, *Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Qurbana Oru Padanam*, 159.

⁸⁶ T. Mannooramparampil, *Syro-Malabar Sabhayude Qurbana Oru Padanam*, 160.

His salvific works, His presence in the Church and His second coming at the end of the world.⁸⁶ After this rite the first deacon keeps the Cross on the *bema*.

2.4.3. Signing of the Cross

In the Christian liturgy, blessing is generally given with the sign of the Cross⁸⁷. "Cross as the manifestation of divine love is the sign of passion, death, resurrection, life, victory, power, protection, honour, obedience, reconciliation, and sanctification through the power of the Holy Spirit."⁸⁸ When the celebrant blesses the people or the things during the Holy *Qurbana*, as the result of the redemptive work of Christ, they obtain holiness.⁸⁹ "For Christians all blessings are through the salvific work of the Son of God."⁹⁰ When the celebrant blesses the people the Thomas Christians make the sign of the Cross on themselves. Thus the blessing is given and received with the sign of the Cross. When one makes the sign of the Cross on oneself it is understood that one is being blessed by the Lord. In all other sacraments (mysteries) also the blessing is always done with the sign of the Cross, whether with hand, water or oil. "Cross is the mystery or the sacrament

of the sacraments in the sense that all the other sacraments are performed by it."⁹¹ Moolan speaks of the power and potency of the Cross:

The Cross, which reconciled heaven and earth as God's wisdom against human wisdom, manifests the theology of suffering as a great joy of becoming one with Christ in this world. This dynamism of the Cross is found in sacraments and sacramentals through the sign of Cross made upon the material elements to transform them to the spiritual entities. The whole liturgy manifests the dynamism of the Cross through blessing, sealing, sanctifying, and setting apart persons and things. There is no liturgy without Cross, which redeemed humanity from the fall of Adam.⁹²

There are different occasions in the *Raza* when the celebrant makes sign of the Cross on oneself, over the chalice and paten, gifts, on the faithful, altar etc. "The sign of the Cross on the forehead is considered a symbol of salvation"⁹³ and signing with the sign of the Cross on things or persons indicates that they are set apart and dedicated to God.⁹⁴

⁸⁷ For the details of the history of the sign of the cross as a sacramental gesture see, J. Moolan, *Introduction to Oriental Liturgy and Its Theology: Syro-Malabar Church*, Kottayam 2013, 237-238.

⁸⁸ J. Moolan, "Liturgical Mystagogy Part II", *Christian Orient* 34, 1 (March 2013) 27.

⁸⁹ T. Thekkekara, *Visudha Qurbana Oru Theerthadanam*, Changanacherry 1988, 38.

⁹⁰ P. Maniyattu, "The Theological Significance of the Cross", in P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Folly of the Cross*, Bangalore - Kottayam 2000, 96.

⁹¹ P. Yousif, "An Introduction to the East Syrian Spirituality: Liturgical Ecclesial and Theological Dimensions", in A. Thottakara, ed., *East Syrian Spirituality*, Rome - Bangalore 1990, 39.

⁹² J. Moolan, "Liturgical Mystagogy Part II", 28.

⁹³ F. Thonippara, "Veneration of the Cross among the St. Thomas Christians", in P. Kochappilly, ed., *The Folly of the Cross*, Bangalore - Kottayam 2000, 339.

⁹⁴ F. Thonippara, "Veneration of the Cross among the St. Thomas Christians", 339.

Periodic signing of Cross in the Holy *Qurbana* is a reminder of the victory of Christ over sin and death and His second coming with the sign of the Cross at the end of the ages.⁹⁵

2.4.3.1. Sign of the Cross over the Mysteries

The celebrant signs the mysteries three times during the *Qurbana*. The first time it is done after the first *g'hanta*. The dialogue prayer begins with the sign of the Cross over the mysteries, saying "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all now and always and for ever." Second time it is during the doxology at the end of the third *g'hanta*. Third time it is repeated during the doxology at the end of the fourth *g'hanta*. Thus the first, third and fourth *g'hanta* ends with the solemn doxology and sign of the Cross over the mysteries, whereas the second *g'hanta* has *Sanctus* at its end.

During the rite of preparation, both the chalice and the paten are incensed while the archdeacon makes the sign of the Cross with them. The chalice is prepared first at the right *bethgazza*. After the prayer of incensing with the sign of the Cross, the archdeacon pours wine into the chalice in the form of the Cross saying, "The precious Blood is poured into the chalice of Christ, our Lord in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." Then the archdeacon pours a little water into the chalice in the form of the Cross saying, "One of the soldiers came and

pierced the side of our Lord with a spear; and immediately there came out blood and water and he who saw it has borne witness, and his witness is true, In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The archdeacon pours wine a second time into the chalice saying, "Wine is mixed with water and wine, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Amen." The chalice is incensed with the sign of the Cross, wine is poured twice and water is poured once in the form of the Cross.

The Paten is prepared in the left *bethgazza*. The archdeacon blesses the paten with the prayer of blessing and making the sign of the Cross with the paten while the deacon incenses it. Then the archdeacon takes the *Bukra* and puts it on the paten, saying, "This paten is signed with the sacred Body of our Lord Jesus Christ, in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."

During the rite of presentation, at the beginning of the *Onitha d'Raza*, the archdeacon goes to the left *bethgazza*, takes with both hands the paten with *Bukra* on it, raises it to the forehead and carries it to the middle of the altar. At the same time, the deacon goes to the right *bethgazza*, takes the chalice and carries to the archdeacon at the altar. The archdeacon taking the chalice in his right hand and the paten in his left, Crosses his hands and raises them. Thus the presentation of the gifts is done in the form of Cross.

⁹⁵ S.G. Thakadiyal, *The Eschatological Vision of the East Syrian Holy Qurbana*, UDD, Rome 2009, 77.

During the Institution Narratives, taking the paten the celebrant raises his eyes towards heaven and blesses the bread making the sign of the Cross three times. Likewise taking the chalice, the celebrant makes the sign of the Cross on it three times. This is an important symbolic action leading the assembly to the death of the Lord on the Cross.⁹⁶

During the *Epiclesis*, invoking the Holy Spirit, "O My Lord, may your Holy Spirit come down..." the celebrant holds his right hand crossed over the left upon the oblation.

After elevation, the celebrant kisses the Host in the form of a Cross not touching it with lips, but symbolically. He also says, "Glory to you, O Lord, for your ineffable gift to us for ever."

During the rite of fraction and consignation, the celebrant breaks the Host into two halves and places the half which is in his left hand in its place on the paten, with the broken end facing the chalice. Then he signs the chalice with the half which is in his right hand, saying, "The Precious Blood is signed with the life-giving Body of our Lord Jesus Christ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." He dips into the chalice about one third of the Host which is in his right hand and with that half he signs the other half which is on the paten, saying, "The sacred Body is signed with the propitiatory Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit." Then he takes the

half that is on the paten with his left hand and joins both halves over the chalice and prays for the pardon of offences, forgiveness of sins, great hope of the resurrection from the dead and the new life in the kingdom of heaven. Then he places the two halves on the paten one upon the other in the form of a Cross so that the broken end of the particle below faces the chalice, and the particle above, the priest. According to Timothy II, all the mysteries are perfected and fulfilled by the sign of the Cross in the name of the Trinity⁹⁷.

2.4.3.2. Sign of the Cross on the Altar

The altar is signed, only once, with the sign of the Cross during the celebration. It is done in the middle of the fourth *g'hanta*. While signing the altar in the form of the Cross, all the children of the holy Catholic Church who have been signed with the living and life-giving seal of holy baptism are remembered.

2.4.3.3. Sign of the Cross on Celebrant Himself

The priest signs himself four times with the sign of the Cross. Two signings are done just before the blessing of peace. At the end of the first *g'hanta*, the celebrant kisses the altar, crosses his hands on his chest and makes the sign of the Cross over himself saying, "We offer you praise and honour, worship and thanksgiving now and always and forever." The second one is towards the end of the rite of reconciliation. The celebrant blesses himself first and then turning to the people blesses them with peace.

⁹⁶ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 229.

⁹⁷ Timothy II, *Mystery of the Eucharist*, 30.

Two signings are also done before reconciliatory service. One is a sign of the Cross on the forehead. After the commingling of the Body and Blood, the celebrant bows and with his right thumb makes the sign of the Cross on his own forehead. It is a profession of the remission of debts and forgiveness of sins of the whole community in worship. It is a coming back to the love relationship. Just before the rite of reconciliation, the celebrant signs himself saying, "The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all, now and always and for ever."

It is to be remembered that during the elaborate rite of incensing before the elevation of the holy Host, the celebrant joins his hands in the form of Cross over his chest while saying "...forgive my offences and sins, those I know and those that I know not." There are several other occasions during the *Raza*, the celebrant kisses the altar as a sign of respect and love, honour and adoration. But it is only while kissing the altar just before the doxology of the first *g'hanta* and before the elevation of holy Host after the *epiclesis*, the celebrant joins his hands in the form of Cross on his chest.

2.4.3.4. Sign of the Cross on Deacons

At the end of the *Turgama*, the first deacon, carrying the book of the "Apostle" goes to the left side of the celebrant and requests the blessing. The celebrant blesses him with the sign of the Cross saying, "May Christ

make you wise by his holy teaching and make you a true mirror for those who hear from your lips the words of his doctrine through the goodness of his grace. Amen." After the creed, the celebrant turns to the deacon and blesses him saying, "May God, the Lord of all, strengthen you to sing his praise." After the rite of consignation, the celebrant makes the sign of the Cross on the foreheads of the deacons saying, "May Christ accept your ministry and illumine your face; May He keep your life and nourish your youth."

2.4.3.5. Sign of the Cross on the Community

The community is marked by the sign of the Cross on five different occasions. It is done before the proclamation of the Gospel, twice during the imparting of peace, as part of the invitation for communion and during the final blessing. Before the proclamation of the Gospel, the celebrant blesses the people with the book of the Gospel saying, "Peace be with you." At the end of the first *g'hanta* and towards the end of the rite of reconciliation the celebrant turns to the people and blesses with the sign of the Cross saying, "Peace be with you." During the rite of communion the celebrant blesses the people saying, "May the gift of the grace of the Giver of life, our Lord Jesus Christ, be made perfect in us all through His mercy." Towards the end of the *Huttama*, the celebrant blesses and seals the people with the sign of the Cross. By this sealing the assembly promises that they will live according to the transformation taken place during the celebration.⁹⁸

⁹⁸ V. Pathikulangara, *Qurbana*, 265

2.4.3.6. Blessing of the Incense with the Sign of the Cross

The incense is always blessed with a sign of the Cross. After the rite of kissing the Cross the deacons bring the censer and the frankincense. The celebrant puts three grains of frankincense into the censer and blesses it in the name of the Trinity making the sign of the Cross that it may be pleasing to the Lord and for the remission of the debts of the sheep of His flock. After the first *g'hanta*, before the dialogue prayer the deacon presents the censer and the celebrant blesses the incense making the sign of the Cross and incenses the altar.

2.4.3.7. Sign of the Cross over the Veil

During the rite of prostration, the celebrant kneels and kisses the veil bearing the image of a Cross on it, spread on the floor of the *baykala*. It is done three times and stands erect, and makes a sign of the Cross over it while singing: "...the Body and Blood of Christ." He repeats the same on the other three sides of the veil moving to the right. Thus the signing of the Cross on the veil is done from all the four sides.

2.5. Cross in the Liturgical Year

St. Thomas Christians have the spiritual life according to the various seasons of the

liturgical year⁹⁹. The season of Elijah-Cross (*Elia-Sliba*) in the Syro-Malabar liturgical year symbolizes the second coming of the Lord and the victory of the Cross, which is the symbol of Christ's victory over death and the powers of this world.

In the middle of this period, on September 14, the Church celebrates the feast of the exaltation of the Cross¹⁰⁰ or the finding of the Cross. It is the celebration of the glorious Cross and its finding by empress Helena, mother of emperor Constantine in the fourth century.¹⁰¹ The great solemnity of the glorious Cross on September 14 is the basic theme of the liturgical period of *Elia-Sliba*. Church emphasizes the love and reverence to the Cross of Christ as a sign of redemption. In short, the glorification and the veneration of the Cross of Christ is the central theme of the period of Elijah-Cross.

The liturgy celebrates the glorious victory and power of the Cross with its eschatological significance which symbolizes the second coming of Christ. The Thomas Christians used to observe fast of Elia and Cross, pray for the remission of their sins and renewal of life as a preparation for the eschatological events.¹⁰² The variable prayers and readings of this season have a highly

⁹⁹ M. Vellanickal, "The Syro-Malabar Church As An Individual Church", 142.

¹⁰⁰ In the early Church, the Feast of the Exaltation of the Cross was held as equal to Easter celebration. In the Eastern Traditions, this feast emerged as the 'Second Easter' in the second half of the liturgical year. It could be understood only from the veneration of the Cross as a Sacrament of the Risen Lord, for the empty Cross had great significance in the early Church.

¹⁰¹ The Holy Cross is said to have been discovered in 326 AD by empress Helena, the mother of the Roman Emperor Constantine, during a pilgrimage she made to Jerusalem. There are three important legends regarding the finding of the Cross: Protonica legend, Maccarius legend and Kuriakos legend. See for the details: J. Moolan, *Liturgical Year: Syro-Malabar Church*, Kottayam 2013, 237-242.

¹⁰² J. Aerthayil, *The Spiritual Heritage of the St. Thomas Christians*, Bangalore 2001, 190.

eschatological tone and thus the Church wishes to instill an eschatological sense in the minds of the faithful. The transfiguration of the Lord on mount Tabor was a foretaste of the heavenly bliss to the selected apostles. The presence of Moses and Elia proclaims Jesus as the fulfilment of the Law and the Prophets.

The Church reaches her destiny in the second coming of the Lord is a recurring theme in this season. It was believed that Prophet Elia would appear¹⁰³ before the second coming of the Lord and would oppose the son of perdition and reveal his deceit. Then there would appear the *Sliba*, the sign of the Son of God in the heavens. The "Sign of the Son of Man" (Mt 24:30) that would appear in heaven at the end of the world would be the Holy Cross itself. Tradition of the Church also holds testimony to this fact. It is from this belief that this season began to be called *Elia-Sliba*. "The Cross will appear again with Jesus from heaven; for His emblem will precede the King...and we shall glory, taking pride in the Cross, worshipping the Lord who was sent, and was crucified

for us..."¹⁰⁴ It is a forerunner to the day of the Lord and a crown of splendor for faithful and with this the faithful shall triumph.

2.6. Cross in the Divine Praises

The prayers and the hymns of the season of resurrection extol the glory of the Cross. The angels and humans unite on the Cross as it has become the symbol of great pride for the humans. Just like the serpent raised by Moses removed the fear, the Cross that was raised on Calvary defeated death.¹⁰⁵ The Cross that lifted up the Lord on the earth is the source of grace and it is a weapon against death.¹⁰⁶

The Syriac fathers draw a contrast between the sword that the angel carried to keep humans out of paradise, and the lance that pierced the side of Christ leading everyone to paradise. Ephrem in *Hymn on Nativity* 8.4 says, "so that by the opening of his side he might open up the way into paradise"¹⁰⁷. The cross in the Syriac tradition is the way to heaven¹⁰⁸. Narsai describes the death of Jesus on Calvary in a similar manner

¹⁰³ The Jews believed that Elia would appear again because of his unique way of disappearance (2 Kings 2:11). That's why people suspected John the Baptist and Jesus as Elia (Jn 1:25; Mt 16:14; Mt 27:49). Cfr. C. Payngot, "The Liturgical Year of the East Syriac Church", in A. Mekkattukunnel, ed., *Mar Thoma Margam: The Ecclesial Heritage of the St Thomas Christians*, Kottayam 2012, 333.

¹⁰⁴ Cyril of Jerusalem, *Catechesis* XIII, 41; FC 64, 31.

¹⁰⁵ S.M.B.C. Committee for Divine Office, *Yamaprarthanakal*, Changanacherry 1986, 325.

¹⁰⁶ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 328; K. Moonjeli, *Maharahasyam Aradhanavalsarathil*, Kanjirapally 2008, 69.

¹⁰⁷ E. BECK, *Des Heiligen Ephraem des Syrers Hymnen de Nativitae (Epiphania)*, CSCO 186, 187, Scr. Syr. Tom., 82, 83 Louvain 1959, 59/51-52. Ephrem explains in his *Hymn on the Cross*: "Blessed are you, O living Wood [of the Cross], For you have become a lance hidden for death; In effect, the Son struck by the lance, has killed death At the moment where the lance pierced Him. His lance has abolished the lance, For his pardon has torn up the written at [of our condemnation], Behold Paradise of the blessed where those who ought to come out have entered And where the rejected [have recovered] their home". P. Yousif, "La croix de Jesus et le paradis d'Eden dans la typologie biblique de Saint Ephrem", *Parole de l'Orient* 6, 7 (1975-76), 46.

¹⁰⁸ S. Bonian, "Narsai on the Passion of Jesus and the Exalted Humanity", *Diakonia* 19, 1-3 (1984-85), 99.

as that of St. Ephrem.¹⁰⁹ Narsai describes, "O wonder that on Golgotha was being spoken by a mortal; because the body which was fastened on the cross was opening a way to Eden!" (Homi.121). Once the Cross was a punishment for the sinners but now it is the shield that protects. Cross is the tree on which the fruits of mercy grow¹¹⁰ and it is the sign of victory on earth.¹¹¹

The prayers and the hymns of the season of *Elia-Sliba* emphasizes Cross as the source of all goodness and life giving sign. The Lord gave us the Cross as a weapon to fight against the evil one and on the Cross there is victory.¹¹² At the time of death humans have to leave the wealth for others (Ps 49:10). On the Day of Judgment, the sins committed by the love of money will stand against them. If the roots of the life-tree are on the earth, it produces only earthly fruits. Hence, one should be rooted in the Lord.¹¹³

To those who walk in the way of the world, the message of the Cross is a waste and to those who consider it as the source of God's power, it is a sign of salvation. The Cross strengthens Church. The beauty and riches of this life is transitory. Death equals everybody and the Lord remains forever. The power of evil deteriorates and death shivers

at the Cross. It gives immortality to the humans as it is the source of life.¹¹⁴ At the side of the Cross one has to have the attitude of the repentant thief. One has to be like the sensible bridesmaids who were ready to enter the bridal chamber.

The power of the Cross is compared with many OT types like the piece of wood at Mara (Ex 15:22-25), the raised rode of Moses over Red sea (Ex 14:16), the tree of life in Paradise (Gen 3:22) and the raised bronze serpent in desert (Num 21:8-9). As the piece of wood at Mara made the water sweet, the Cross altered and reorganized the bitterness of death to the sweetness of life.¹¹⁵ Just as Moses extended the stick and showed the way to Israel through the sea, Christ through the Cross showed the way to heaven.¹¹⁶ Just as Ark of Noah, the Cross protects the human beings.¹¹⁷ As the raised bronze serpent in wilderness saved the Israelites from snakes' bite, the Cross protected and saved the sinners who trust on it. "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that whoever believes in him may have eternal life" (Jn 3:13-15). The Cross of Christ helps and strengthens the disciples to carry daily crosses joyfully. All the prayers of the season persuade

¹⁰⁹ S. Bonian, "Narsai on the Passion of Jesus and the Exalted Humanity", 99.

¹¹⁰ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 129.

¹¹¹ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 261.

¹¹² *Yamaprarthanakal*, 456.

¹¹³ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 457.

¹¹⁴ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 464.

¹¹⁵ J. Moolan, *Liturgical Year*, 249.

¹¹⁶ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 479.

¹¹⁷ *Yamaprarthanakal*, 493.

the humans to lead a life, setting the mind on the things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God (Col 3:2).

3. Conclusion

Christ offered himself on the Cross for the salvation of all. "When Christ had offered for all time a single sacrifice for sins, 'he sat down at the right hand of God,' and since then has been waiting 'until his enemies would be made a footstool for his feet.' For by a single offering he has perfected for all time those who are sanctified" (Heb 10:12-14). "Then I saw between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders a Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth" (Rev 5:6). These texts reveal the new dimensions of the lasting sacrifice on the Cross.¹¹⁸ According to Syriac Mystical theology, "the Cross is the gate of the path of mystic; the gnosis of the Cross is given through the suffering of the Cross, through this gate happens the entrance into the heavenly mysteries."¹¹⁹ The glorious Cross is the living sign of Jesus' victory over death, sin and suffering. It is the Tree of Life, Stem of Jesse (Jesus), Staff of Comfort (Holy

Spirit), Ark of Noah (Church), the sign of Jesus' life, death and Resurrection, and that of Christian perfection. Thus the Cross is the sum total of authentic Christian living.

The St. Thomas Christians revere the St. Thomas Cross as a symbol of the person of Christ. For them it represents the passion, death, resurrection and the second coming of the Lord. They see it as the symbol of their Christian faith and the summary of their Christian living. Hence it is an unavoidable symbol of the presence of the risen Lord in their liturgical settings, social and personal life. There is a rich symbolic and theological significance of the non-figurative representation of the mystery of the Cross, mystery of glory and the mystery of Life. The liturgy presents the Cross as the source of life and resurrection. The erosion of the understanding of the symbolic and theological significance of the symbols used in the Christian liturgy may even lead to the erosion of true Christian Spirituality. Therefore there is an exigency of a concerted effort to imbibe and inculcate the message of the Cross as the power and presence of God, manifestation of His supreme love, cause of all good and strong fortress and as one of the essentials of Christian identity.

□

¹¹⁸ R. Yanney, "The Eucharist and its Theological Aspects in Scripture, Liturgy, and Patristic Writings", *Coptic Church Review* 32 (2011), 32.

¹¹⁹ Issac of Niniveh in Wensinch (ET), 544 cited in P. Yousif, "An Introduction to the East Syrian Spirituality", in A. Thottakara, ed., *East Syrian Spirituality*, Rome - Bangalore 1990, 78-79.

THE OLD TESTAMENT EXEGESIS IN THE *KṬĀBĀ D-MASSQĀTĀ*

Sr. Roselin MTS

The anonymous Syriac treatise the *Ḳṭābā d-Massqāṭā*¹ 'The Book of Steps' consists of 30 *mēmre* (ḡmīrē) or Sermons, prefaced by a *mamlā* (ḡmīlā)². These 30 *mēmre* are of varying length and written in several genres like sermons, rules of the ascetic life, biblical exegeses, theological controversies, etc. The character of this collection points to the most fertile period in Syriac asceticism, especially during its golden age in the 4th and 5th centuries³. This extensive document presents a multi-leveled believing community with two main distinct groups *kēnē* (ḡkēnā) «the Upright» and *gmīrē* (ḡgmīrā) «the Perfect»⁴. The state of perfection (ḡgmīrā) is presented as the primitive state of Adam before the fall, i.e., while

Adam had not yet sinned⁵. But after the fall he lost that state of Perfection and was in a state inferior to Perfection viz. in Uprightness (ḡkēnā)⁶.

1. The use of Bible

The author presents his spiritual guidelines using the framework of the salvation history. He has a clear vision about the progress of human beings from creation, through fall and recovery, and on towards perfection⁷ i.e. the perfection intended for them by God. For developing his thoughts the author quotes only from the biblical books even though their canonicity is under discussion⁸. While travelling through the

⁵ Cf. PS III, 736⁹⁻¹⁶; 920¹⁻³; A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, 35-40.

⁶ Cf. PS III, 736²⁴⁻²⁶; A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia*, 161-164.

⁷ Cf. C. STEWART, *Working the Earth of the Heart*, 87.

⁸ No fixed canon was there in the Syriac Churches till Mar Rabbula (411-435 C.E.) edited *Peshitta* (ḡpšīṭā) as the authoritative form of the Bible, for all the Churches of Syriac tradition. The nature of the use of Bible before the redaction of *Peshitta* is uncertain. We had some indications in *The doctrine of Addai, the Apostle* (supposed to be a 4th C document). It mentions about the reading of *Diatessaron*, the Law and the Prophets the Gospel and the Epistles of St. Paul and the Acts of the Apostles, in their assemblies. Cf. *The Doctrine of Addai, the Apostle*, G. PHILLIPS, ed.-tr., 1961.

The name *Peshitta* is used both for the OT translation made in 2nd C based on Hebrew text and for a revision of Old Syriac version of the NT, which became the standard version around 400 C.E. For a detailed description of the

¹ The first critical edition of this work was prepared and made available in print by Michael Kmosko. Cf. *Ḳṭābā d-Massqāṭā Liber Graduum* KMOSKO, M., ed., □ tr., in R. GRAFFIN, ed., *Patrologia Syriaca* 3, Parisiis 1926. This edition contains the Syriac text with Latin translation with the title *Liber Graduum*. The work is fully or partially translated into different modern languages. The details are given in the bibliography. Hereafter we use the «KM» to refer the work.

² Cf. PS III, 1-10. *ḡmīlā* means «speech», «talk» etc. Cf. M. SOKOLOFF, *A Syriac Lexicon*, 777. In this context *ḡmīlā* is the preface by the Syriac editor who compiled these 30 *mēmre*.

³ Cf. F. BAÏSSARI, «Liber Graduum», 62.

⁴ The 14th *mēmre* 'On the Upright and the Perfect' (ḡkēnā ḡgmīrā) is devoted to present these two categories Cf. PS III, 324-333.

Also *mēmre* 1 & 2 Cf. PS, III, 12-44.

30 homilies, an observer sees that the thought pattern of the author and the addressed community is shaped by the Bible. We have nearly 1200 citations from Bible⁹, especially from the Gospels and the Pauline corpus inclusive of Hebrews¹⁰. All his illustrations and allusions are biblical, the only exception

being the *mēmṛā* 6¹¹. While exhorting the people to lead a perfect life by turning back to the «original state of Adam before the fall», he continuously used the Bible to support his arguments «reading into and extracting out of the Biblical text»¹².

There are scholars who consider it as a «work of biblical commentary designed to describe and highlight the biblical bases for the distinction between the Perfect and the Upright and their separate but interdependent ways of life»¹³. But we are not sure whether our

biblical traditions of the Syriac Churches, Cf. S. BROCK, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*; R. B. TERHAARROMENY – C.E. MORRISON, «Peshitta», 326-332. The date of the *Peshitta* OT is uncertain, but seems that most books were translated in between second century C.E. to the early third century C.E. The translation might have been a gradual process done by several people. There exists a possibility that the young Syriac Church will have been inherited the translations of several books from Jewish communities of the region of Edessa and Nisibis. Cf. S. BROCK, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 17. In addition to the *Peshitta* we have other OT syriac translations, mainly that made by Paul of Tella during the years 614 to 616 from the Greek Septuagint called «the Seventy *šba'im*» well known among modern scholars as *Syro-Hexapla* and the revised translation of certain OT books done by Jacob of Edessa. Cf. *Idem.*, 18. The Apocryphals or deuterocanonical books were translated from Greek except Bar Sira (Ecclesiasticus), which was translated from Hebrew. Cf. S. BROCK, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 17-18.

⁹Cf. R.A. KITCHEN, «Slouching towards Antioch», 55.

¹⁰ According to Wickham, the author used the Antiochian canon without the book of Revelation, 2Peter, Jude, and the small Johannines. Cf. L. WICKHAM, «Teachings about God and Christ», 487.

¹¹ Cf. PS III, 140-144(6, 1-2). In this smallest *mēmṛā* of the collection, the author presents the analogy of a king having a chest made for his jewels to explain the possibility of the Perfect to grow continuously beyond the so called stage of perfection.

¹² R.A. KITCHEN, «Slouching towards Antioch», 54. In this article Kitchen try to analyze whether our author followed Antiochian school for exegesis and concluded with a big «No». Cf. *Ibid.*, 53-79.

¹³ K. SMITH, «A Last Disciple», 90. He supports his argument by saying that the KM is mentioned in the collection of commentaries of *Catena Severi*. Cf. the margin note of MS *Vat. Syr.* 103, f.116r. The MS is available in online. For this particular page Cf.

http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.sir.103.pt.1/0232/scroll?sid=c9da5f9dc4d275636c8b00307bdfa150.

For Smith this reference indicates «if only in a small way, that the Book of Steps was used by and familiar to at least one later monk searching for a reference to add to a biblical commentary. The Book of Steps was read not as an exclusively ascetic treatise, though the manuscript evidence shows that this is certainly part of the story, and the text was surely not a

author intended to write a systematic biblical commentary. Even though the use of NT¹⁴ and the mode of exegesis¹⁵ are partially and briefly studied by different scholars, we have very few studies on its OT exegesis O¹⁶.

lost piece of foreign literature irrelevant to later times and places». Cf. *Ibid.*, f.no. 58.

¹⁴ In 1932 by analyzing the quotations from the New Testament found in the *KM*, A. RÜCKER stood in favor with the opinion of Kmosko that our author used Diatessaron. Cf. Kmosko, *Praefatio*, CLXII; A. RÜCKER, «Die Zitate», 342-354. Later many scholars focused on this area to find out the sources of biblical quotations in the *KM*. Cf. A. BAKER, «The Significance of the New Testament», 171-175; P. BETTIOLO, «Scrittura e cristianesimo», 480. The *KM* is an important witness to the early text of Paul in Syriac tradition. Some focused their research to find out the source of Pauline quotations. Cf. J. KERSCHENSTEINER, *Der altsyrische Paulustext*, 159-161; M. WESTERHOFF, «Zur Paulus-Rezeption», 253-259; ID., *Das Paulusverständnis*; ID., «Did the Author of the Book of Steps», 119-128.

¹⁵ To see the unique exegesis of the verse Phil. 2,6 provided by the author of the *KM*, cf. A. LOUF, «Une ancienne exégèse», 523-533. We have also many later studies: Cf. R. ROUX, «Biblical Exegesis», 99-118; W. STROTHMANN, «Jesus-Sirach-Zitate bei Afrhat», 153-158; A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 183-200; R.A. KITCHEN, «Making the Imperfect Perfect», 227-251.

¹⁶ Some scholars briefly handled the theme just to support their main arguments. Cf. A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 185-188; A. KOFISKY, — S. RUZER, «Reading the Ascetic Ideal», 273-296; R.A. KITCHEN, «Syriac Additions to Anderson», 1-47;

In this short paper we will try to focus on the OT citations and allusions.

2. The Canon of the Old Testament

It is very hard to determine the books included in the first OT *Peshitta*. The four manuscripts those containing almost complete Old Testament¹⁷ differ in several aspects when we compare the contents and the order of books. That means neither the content nor the order of the books were fixed properly at the time of those MSS. Hence it is not easy to speak something about the canon of OT used in the *KM*. Before reaching to a conclusion let us analyze the OT citations from the work.

3. The OT Books and the Apocryphals

We have hundreds of citations from the Canonical as well as the Deutrocanonical books of OT. Kmosko suggests the probability of the use of certain Apocryphals too, to narrate the story of Adam and Eve by our author¹⁸. Since we have no sound evidence for their sure use, considering such narrations from the common reservoir of thought of that period, Kowalski rejected the suggestions of Kmosko by saying that «I passi da lui indicati

P. BETTIOLO, «Adamo in Eden e la Liturgia Celeste», 274-305.

¹⁷ For the details of these manuscripts Cf. S. BROCK, *The Bible in the Syriac Tradition*, 42-43.

¹⁸ Cf. Kmosko, *Praefatio*, LIV. CLXVIII.

3.2.1 Tobit

The golden rule in the negative form in Tb 4,15: «Whatever you hate do not do to your neighbour» is found in many places in the KM²⁴. Since the state of the Upright is always characterized by the golden rule in its negative and positive versions, our author used it in multiple places.

יש לי חלום רחוק
ולבתי לא ידעתי מהו
עלי לראות את הלב
הזה והוא לי חלום
היה זה חלום

25

היה זה חלום.

But it does not mean that he quoted it from the book of Tobit. As Kowalski says such an expression was very common in ancient world. Hence it can't provide a sound basis to support the use of Tobit²⁶.

3.2.2 Bar Sirach

There are two occasions where the author mentioned the name Bar Sirach.

1. As Bar Sirach said (*בן סירא* *Ben Sirach*). Or [like] a wise man who cuts away our diseases and washes away our cancers, because not everyone knows

3.1 The Canonical books

Being formed during the first decades of 5th century, it is sure that the *KM* represents the archaic phase of the formation of OT canon of *Peshitta*²⁰. Major parts of the OT citations are from the canonical books like Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, I, II, Samuel, I, II Kings, Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel, Hosea, Joel, Haggai, Malachi and Sirach²¹. According to Kowalski the absence of certain books like Chronicles, Ezra, Nehemiah and Ester supports the use of primitive Syriac canon²².

3.2 Deutrocanonical books

The critical editor Kmosko identified certain citations from Deutrocanonical books Tobit and Sirach²³.

¹⁹ Cf. A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 184.

²⁰For brief study of archaic OT canon cf., I. Ortiz de Urbina, *Patrologia Syriaca*, 244; R. MURRAY, *Symbols of Church*, 20.

²¹For the details Cf. PS III, 1154-1155.

²² Cf. A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 183.

²³ Cf. PS III, 1154-1155.

²⁴ Cf. PS III, 144¹⁰⁻¹²(7,1); 921²²-924¹(30,28).

²⁵ Love the Lord with all your heart and people as yourself (Mt. 22, 37.39), and that thing that you hate, do not do to your neighbour, and as you wish that people do to you so also you do to them (Lk. 6, 31; Mt 7,12).

PS. III, 373²⁷-376⁴(15,16).

²⁶ Cf. A. KOWALSKI, *Perfezione e Giustizia di Adamo*, 183.

how to cut the body on account of the nerves that should not be severed, except he who has taken care to learn how to cut²⁷.

2. Moreover, Bar Sirach said (ܐܒܝ ܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܚܝܬܐ), If you would hand yourself over to the service of God, lower yourself more than all there is in the land, [for] you hand yourself over to all [kinds] of trials²⁸

Both these verses are much different in biblical text²⁹. Hence here too the scholars failed to prove the possibility of the sure use of the syriac translation of the book of Sirach by our author.

3.3 OT Apocryphals

We could see an allusion from the book of 1 Enoch 8, 1-2³⁰ evil spirits teaches the men to use hidden swords.

4.The OT – NT Relation

He never speaks about the canon of Bible. For him the testimonies of the Scripture (ܠܚܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ) are of the Prophets, of our Lord and of the

Apostles³¹. The person who partakes of God can understand scripture and distinguish the commandments³².

4.1 The Unity of the Testaments

For our author both the testaments are God created and he believes in its unity. The OT is at the service of the NT.

When he said He made both of them one Testament and he annulled law of the commandments by his commandments, so that he might make everything new with one testament. From now on not a single letter ܝܕܐ (yōd)³³ will pass away from the Law and the prophets. As for the rest, the whole Law and Prophets up to John we established in order to serve and then pass away³⁴.

The KM presents prophets as those who had «a love that conformed to the Ten Commandments and the New Testament (ܐܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ)»³⁵. For our author «the Lord of OT», the creator God is one God and Lord of all (ܐܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ)³⁶. Once he posits a question «Today's God, is he not the same one as of old (ܐܠܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ ܕܝܠܕܐܝܬܐ)

²⁷ PS III, 180⁴⁻⁷(7,18).

²⁸ PS III, 453³⁻⁴(19,3).

²⁹ The possibility of the use of the Sirach in the KM is studied by Strothmann. Cf. W. STROTHMANN, «Jesus-Sirach-Zitate bei Afrahat», 153-158. For him the two possible references in the KM is not sufficient to prove the sure use of the Sirach.

³⁰ «Azazyel taught men to make swords...» Azazyel is a fallen angel

Cf. *The Book of Enoch*, tr. R. Laurence.

³¹ Cf. PS III, 5²¹⁻²²; 9⁵⁻⁸. May be he is speaking about OT, Gospels, Epistles and Acts of the Apostles.

³² PS III, 13²⁵⁻²⁷.

³³ See the following section 4.2 to know about Yōd.

³⁴ PS III, 681²¹-684²(22,21).

³⁵ PS III, 201³⁻⁴(9,1).

³⁶ PS III, 128⁶(5,15).

ܡܫܝܚܐ ܐܡ ܢܥܡ)? »³⁷. He never disregarded OT. Regarding our duty to love God he declares that it is written in both the testaments.

prepare for the Lord a perfect people (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܢܥܡ) zealous for good works and loving its God with all its heart and everyone else as itself (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ) — as it has been written in both Testaments³⁸ (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ)³⁹.

We could see Mt 22, 37-40 quoted by our author. He presents Jesus' vision of «the love of God and of the neighbor» as the great commandments (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܢܥܡ) in Torah upon which hangs the whole power of the Law and the Prophets (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ)⁴⁰. He commented the gospel passage by defining the meaning of the «neighbour (ܡܫܝܚܐ)» as «all people (ܡܫܝܚܐ)»⁴¹ precisely every person whom you meet is your neighbour (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ)⁴², again more clearly «if a person has mercy on the one who meets him, he becomes his neighbour (ܡܫܝܚܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ ܡܠܟܐ)⁴³».

³⁷ PS III, 184¹⁶⁻¹⁷(7,19).

³⁸ Dt 6,5; Mt 22,37.

³⁹ PS III, 128²⁻⁶(5,15).

⁴⁰ PS III, 148⁸⁻¹²(7,2).

⁴¹ PS III, 149¹⁴⁻¹⁵(7,2).

⁴² PS III, 149¹⁷⁻¹⁸(7,2).

⁴³ PS III, 149²²⁻²⁴(7,2).

4. 2Yōd: The Ten Commandments

In the *KM* we can see an indirect reference to Mt 5,18 as «From now on not a single letter ܝܕ(yōd) will pass away from the Law and the prophets »⁴⁴. Here the Ten Commandments are symbolically represented by the letter ܝܕ(yōd) which has the numerical value 10.

from then one letter yōd will remain- which is the ten commandments which are called yōd for there are ten commandments in the number of the signs⁴⁵.

5. The OT Characters

We can see a series of OT figures in the *KM*. Many of them were brought to the scene to give their testimony of life, and to interpret the status of Old Testament prophets in the locus of the institutions of the Upright and the Perfect.

5.1 Adam and sons

He is presented as an Upright. He had fallen from the stage of Perfection and remained in the state of Uprightness⁴⁶. Adam, who did no harm to anyone, not even struck the cheek of Cain who had killed his brother Abel⁴⁷ is here in the *KM* to show the characteristics of an

⁴⁴ PS III, 681²⁴⁻²⁵(22,21).

⁴⁵ PS III, 684⁷⁻¹¹(22,21).

⁴⁶ PS III, 17²⁴⁻²⁶(1,4).

⁴⁷ PS III, 65315-20(22,9).

Upright. Abel (ܐܒܠ) by submitting himself to his murderer without striking him pursued Perfection. Adam also never required vengeance for Abel from the hands of Cain⁴⁸. He is the main character in the *KM*. More about Adam and Eve will be dealt in the following section of the first chapters of Genesis.

5.2 Abraham and Hosea

They are those blessed, who received the commandments that have been given to individual people only⁴⁹. Abraham is again presented as one who pursued Perfection, by shedding his love for all, without considering who is good and who is evil one, just as God, who makes his Sun shine upon the good and the evil. Again imitating our Lord he washed the feet of the foreigners. And many other episodes of his life are cited to prove how he pursued the Perfection⁵⁰.

5.3 Melchizedek

The famous episode of Melchizedek – Abraham encounter is cited here. He met Abraham with bread and wine and blessed him because he had kept the commandments⁵¹.

5.4 Elijah

Elijah too pursued Perfection as a messenger of peace (ܡܨܠܡܬܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ), running ahead his king Ahab who thirsted for his blood. For the honour of the wicked king he prayed for rain and rain fell, so that king can enter in his house with honour⁵².

5.5 Elisha

Elisha is also in the same category of OT figures who pursued the Perfection, but Lord brought him down from uprightness and Love. Two episodes from the 2Kings are mentioned in the *KM* to support this argument. Elisha pursued perfection when he fed and gave drink to his enemies⁵³, by his own will. However he left the uprightness when he cursed and thus killed the children, who laughed at him calling him bald head⁵⁴. But our author claims that he did so because of the will of God (ܕܡܫܝܚܐ ܕܥܠܡܐ)⁵⁵.

5.6 Jacob and Esau

The episode of their encounter is commented in the *KM*. Author says that Jacob pursued Perfection when he humbled himself before his brother Esau⁵⁶. For explain the role of the body

⁴⁸ Gn 4, 1f; PS III, 228¹³⁻²¹(9,11).

⁴⁹ PS III, 21(1, 5-6).

⁵⁰ Cf. PS III, 221¹⁷-224²¹(9,8).

⁵¹ Cf. Gn 14,18; PS III, 224¹⁹⁻²¹(9,8).

⁵² I K 18, 36-46; PS III, 224²²-225¹⁶(9,9).

⁵³ Cf. 2 K 6, 22-23.

⁵⁴ 2 K 2, 23-24.

⁵⁵ Cf. PS III, 225¹⁷-228⁶(9,10)

⁵⁶ Cf. Gn 33; PS III, 244²³-245⁸(9,20).

as important as that of the soul, the *KM* once again remembered this encounter as «Israel bowed down to the one who sought to kill him, and humbled his soul and body (ܡܝܠܟܐ ܡܬܬܠܐ ܠܗܘܐ) and bowed to him many times»⁵⁷.

5.7 Joseph

The story of Joseph is narrated briefly. He also pursued Perfection by doing well to his brothers who tried to kill him twice⁵⁸. Here Joseph is presented as «a friend of Lord like his fathers, and would keep His commandments (ܦܪܝܩܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܠܐ ܠܗܘܐ)»⁵⁹

5.8 Moses, Miriam, Aaron and the Seventy Men

The Nb 12,3 is quoted to explain the reason behind the election of Moses as «God chose Moses because he was the humblest of all people (ܡܘܨܝܐ ܕܡܬܬܠܐ ܠܗܘܐ)»⁶⁰. Miriam, Aaron and «the Seventy men»⁶¹ are presented in the work as the holders of «ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ Minor blessings»⁶² or «ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܠܐ the Pledge of God»⁶³ when

compared to Moses⁶⁴. But it is interesting to see that it never mentions that the Moses or even the Mary the sister of Lazarus received the greatest of all gifts which is called the Spirit the Paraclete (ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ). Moses is again presented as the Upright who pursued Perfection. When Lord asked to kill the Israelites, Moses prayed for them. He loved humanity as himself⁶⁵. But at the same time against his will, just because to obey God's command he did those things that he hated for someone to do to him when he treated «those who worshipped the calf»⁶⁶, and when he slew the sinful Amalek⁶⁷. So he was brought down to a stage lower than Uprightness⁶⁸.

5.9 Noah

The episode of Noah is also referred in 21st sermon⁶⁹. Noah pleased the Lord because he was the most humble of all the earth (ܡܠܬܐ ܕܡܠܝܚܐ ܕܡܬܬܠܐ ܠܗܘܐ)⁷⁰. He prayed to God for the fellow creatures for their salvation. See how author created his own dialogues just taking the scene from the Bible.

Noah said, «No forbid it that you would destroy all the earth». The

⁵⁷ Gn 33,3; 256¹¹⁻¹³(10,4).

⁵⁸ Cf. PS III, 245⁹-248¹¹(9,21).

⁵⁹ Cf. PS III, 248⁸⁻⁹.

⁶⁰ Nb 12,3; 617²⁴⁻²⁵(21,12).

⁶¹ Cf. Nb 11,16. They had received from the gifts of Moses.

⁶² PS III, 72⁸(3,12).

⁶³ PS III, 72⁹(3,12).

⁶⁴ Cf. PS III, 72²⁰⁻²⁴(3,13).

⁶⁵ Cf. Ex 32, 32-33; PS III, 213⁶⁻²⁰(9,5); 620¹⁻¹⁸(21,12).

⁶⁶ Cf. Ex 32, 27.

⁶⁷ Cf. Ex 17, 8-16.

⁶⁸ Cf. PS III, 216¹⁻¹²(9,5)

⁶⁹ Cf. PS III, 620¹⁹-621⁶(21,13); Gn 6-7.

⁷⁰ Cf. PS III, 620²¹⁻²²(21,13).

Lord said to him, «Look, I will place all the earth on the scale with you. If they weigh heavier than you I will forgive them». The Lord weighed them with him and Noah weighed heavier by his lowliness (מבוססו) than all of them. The Lord destroyed all flesh (בשר), which was proud and lightweight in that time⁷¹.

5.10 Rahab the harlot (زینب السلاخی)

Her conversion is appreciated by the author in a splendid way and presented as a model of those who repented and were saved⁷².

5.11 Solomon

Solomon is presented together with Iscariot who were good at the beginning, but sinned at the end⁷³.

5.12 David

David is in the *KM* as one who received forgiveness from God through repentance and pouring of one's soul before Lord⁷⁴. Just like Moses he also presented as one who while being in the state of Uprightness pursued Perfection. When God delivered his persecutor Saul in his hand, instead of killing him, he repaid him good things. But he

commanded Solomon to punish Shimei according to Lord's commandment⁷⁵.

In Catena Severi⁷⁶ to the commentary of I Kings this reference of David's pursuit of perfection is cited as being from the *KM*⁷⁷.

5.13 Job (𐎠𐎢𐏁)

Against the practice to approach diviners and Magicians during one's crisis time, our author exhorts to follow the ancient ones who sought from the Lord until the thing that they lost was found. Even if they did not find it they praised the Lord all the more. The typical example is Job, and his life is almost summarized by our author⁷⁸ with his own famous confession at the climax of all his sufferings and loss «The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord (בֵּרַךְ שֵׁם ה' מְעַלְמָא דְּכֻלָּא בְּרַכְיָא דְּהוּא וְעַלְמָא דְּהוּא וְעַלְמָא דְּהוּא)»⁷⁹. Job's lowliness is also appreciated much⁸⁰.

⁷⁵ Cf. PS III, 21721-24(9,7); I Sm 26; I K 2,8.

⁷⁶ A collection of co

⁷⁷ Cf. the margin note of MS *Vat. Syr.* 103, f.116r in

http://digi.vatlib.it/view/MSS_Vat.sir.103.pt.1/0232/scroll?sid=c9da5f9dc4d275636c8b00307bdfa150.

⁷⁸ Cf. PS III, 173¹¹-176³(7,15).

⁷⁹Jb 1.21, PS III, 173²¹⁻²²(7,15).

⁸⁰ Cf. PS III, 621⁷⁻²³ (21,14).

⁷¹ PS III, 620²⁴-621⁶ (21,13).

⁷² Cf. PS III, 104¹⁴⁻²⁰ (5,3).

⁷³ Cf. PS III, 104²¹⁻²³(5,3).

⁷⁴ Cf. PS III, 169⁸⁻¹²(7,12)

It is very interesting to see how he used this biblical character to support his argument. In the book of Genesis, Enoch had many other children after he begot Methuselah⁸⁹. There he is described as one who walked with God. In the epistle to Hebrew it is written that he never tasted death, he was not found, because God had translated him. But before that he had the testimony that he pleased God⁹⁰. For our author after the birth of his son Methuselah he became Holy. The verb « ܡܠܬ »⁹¹ has a technical meaning in early proto monastic Syriac tradition. The word *Qaddīšā* « ܩܕܝܫܐ » literally means «Holy»⁹² and the abstract, *Qaddīšūā* « ܩܕܝܫܘܬܐ » means «Holiness»⁹³. But in Syriac proto monastic tradition a *Qaddīšā* is a married person who abstains from sexual intercourse. In technical sense *Qaddīšūā* is abstinence from marital intercourse, which can be a temporary or a permanent state⁹⁴. That means in KM, the merit of Enoch is that he renounced sexual relationship.

⁸⁹ Cf. Gn 5,22.

⁹⁰ Cf. Heb 11,5.

⁹¹ To be pure, to hallow sanctify, consecrate, to set apart for a holy use

Cf. J. PAYNE SMITH, *Syriac Dictionary*, 491.

⁹² Cf. J. PAYNE SMITH, *Syriac Dictionary*, 489.

⁹³ Cf. J. PAYNE SMITH, *Syriac Dictionary*, 490.

⁹⁴ A brief study about the derivation of this technical sense of these terms Cf. S. Brock, *Luminous Eye*, 109-112.

5.19 *Satan, Pharaoh and Israelites*

Using these three as his examples, our author explained how God permits freewill in evil people⁹⁵. For him all of them are sinned by their own choice, God never compelled them to do so. Therefore they were judged justly not unjustly. But Ex 11,10 «The Lord hardened the heart of Pharaoh» was commented by our author as «The Lord hardened Pharaoh through good things He did to him and was compassionate upon him and by this gave him an opportunity for repentance...that is, by compassion and good health Pharaoh was hardened»⁹⁶. The same is the fact with Satan too. Because of the kindness of Lord, who « allowed him to be free and did not kill him»⁹⁷, Satan become an opponent.

5.20 *The OT Characters and the Apostles*

The main purpose of our author to present these characters of the OT is to show the vital role of Apostles in the salvation history. Those prophets and great figures of OT were held back from perfection by God himself, and later they admitted into the kingdom following the Apostles. With the support of Heb. 11, 40 the author places the priority of the Apostles (ܐܡܬܐ) in salvation history. According to him,

⁹⁵ Cf. Memra 23 PS III 692-712(23,1-11)

⁹⁶ PS III 708⁶⁻¹²(23,9).

⁹⁷ PS III,70115-17(23,6)

Christ hurried to perfect them before the Prophets and made them first⁹⁸. The author admits the fact that due to the deeds of certain OT prophets they went even below the Uprightness. But they did so because of God's command. So, Jesus perfected them and admitted them to the kingdom after the Apostles⁹⁹.

How much did the mind of the prophets expect this covenant-but it did not come during their days (ܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ). Because of this God was not ashamed to be called their God. This means, he is not ashamed to call them his brothers as he had called the

apostles (ܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ ܕܐܝܬܐ). Because of this he prepared for them a Holy City (ܐܡܝܢܐ ܕܝܗܝܐ). This means He perfected them in the sight of the apostles¹⁰⁰.

It shows the vital role of the Church in salvation history¹⁰¹.

6. Presence of unique expressions of *Peshitta*

In the *KM* we have certain unique expressions of *Peshitta*.

1. Ex 21,24: «An eye for an eye...A cheek for a cheek(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ)»¹⁰².

2. Job 40, 19: «God made him make war(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ)»¹⁰³.

⁹⁸ Cf. *PS III*, 229(9,12)

⁹⁹ They waited for peace (ܐܝܢܐ) in their days, and to be perfected and completed in the Spirit(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ), the Paraclete(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ), and then they would depart from the world(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ). But God did not desire to make peace in that time (ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ), because humanity had not wanted to acknowledge him. On account of this, long beforehand they saw the peace(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ) that would come to exist through our Lord Jesus Christ ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ, they asked about this peace and longed for it and our Lord promised them, 'I will give to you this Perfection ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ which I shall bring about. When I send the Paraclete to the Apostles, I will also perfect(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ) you because you have waited for me and pursued the perfection of the heavenly angels(ܐܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ).

PS III, 229⁵⁻¹⁹(9,12).

7. The Use of the Book of Genesis

The author's favorite character from Old Testament is nobody else but Adam. The first 4 chapters of the book of Genesis are commented in the work in a detailed but in a peculiar way. In this section we try to see the *KM*'s main exegetical arguments from the book of Genesis.

7.1 In beginning – ܐܝܢܐ

The first word of the *Peshitta* Old Testament is «ܐܝܢܐ». Even though the

¹⁰⁰ *PS III*, 212¹⁸⁻²⁵(9,4)

¹⁰¹ *PS III*, 201-248(9,1-21).

¹⁰² *PS III*, 673¹²(22,16).

¹⁰³ Cf. *PS III*, 696³⁻⁴(23,2) in RSV Let him who made him bring near his sword

most frequent passages are from the first chapters of Genesis, the first sentence is never cited anywhere in the work. But we can see the expression « *ከእግዚአብሔር* » or « *ከእግዚአብሔር* » in some places alluding to the first word of the Bible¹⁰⁴.

7.2 Adam created in the image of Angels

It is also relevant to note the absence of the citation of Gn 1, 27a where it is mentioned that God created Man in His image. The allusion to the second part Gn 1, 27b «he created male and female(*ሕፃናት ልጅና ልጅ*)» is there in the KM¹⁰⁵. The author never spoke anything about man as the «image of God». For him Adam is created in the image of Angels (*እግዚአብሔር*) of the heaven. For our author the absence of lust in angels is the main reason for this similarity¹⁰⁶.

Because people fell short of the Perfection (*ሕፃናት*) through which God created Adam and the purity of heart(*ሕፃናት*) that belonged to Adam while he had not yet sinned, and the holiness(*ሕፃናት*) in which he was created in the image of the angel(*እግዚአብሔር*)...¹⁰⁷

But if a person does not adopt the image of the angels (*እግዚአብሔር*)—who do not have fleshly desires(*ሕፃናት*) and carnal lust(*ሕፃናት*)—in this world, he will not become like them in that world.¹⁰⁸

7.3 The incarnated Lord was born in first Adam's image

The purpose of the incarnation of our Lord was to show the people how their initial stage of purity was. For the author Lord was born in the image of Adam before the fall.

Our Lord showed us through His person the Creation of Adam (*ሕፃናት*) and how Adam became like the heavenly angels (*እግዚአብሔር*), without anger and without lust, and without thoughts and faults. According to that image our Lord was born (*ከእግዚአብሔር*)¹⁰⁹.

7.4 Adam nude like a child

In the KM, the desire for the intercourse, i.e. the sexuality is not the part of the original human nature, but out of compassion God allowed it to the fallen humanity. By using the book of Genesis, it presents Adam and Eve as virgins in Paradise and the sexuality as the characteristic of the fallen world. For

¹⁰⁴ PS III, 409²(16,11); 541¹⁸⁻¹⁹(20,6)*ከእግዚአብሔር* ; 760¹³(26,1); 789³(28,2)*ከእግዚአብሔር* .

¹⁰⁵ PS III, 352¹¹⁻¹²(15,7).

¹⁰⁶ Cf. PS III, 344^{12-13,23-24}(15,4); 345⁷⁻⁸(15,7); 352¹⁰⁻¹⁵(15,7); 601¹⁴⁻¹⁹(21,7).

¹⁰⁷ PS III, 920¹⁻⁶(30,24).

¹⁰⁸ PS III, 344²²-345²(15,4).

¹⁰⁹ PS III, 692⁹-693¹(23,1).

Again for supporting his argument our author uses the «close reading» of the Scripture «chronologically»¹⁴. When we read the first chapters of the book of Genesis, according to the chronological sequence of the biblical

For our author «Adam desired intercourse as a result of the teaching of the evil one (אָדאָם מלכא) who had plotted to make him fall from holiness of angels (אָדאָם מלכא) and imitate wild beasts»¹²⁰. By seeing that Adam is fell down from the initial Perfection out

¹²⁰ PS III, 33610-12(15,1)

of compassion God allowed him to enter in to marriage to save him from the further destruction¹²¹. Even though in the *KM* the marriage is intended only for the Upright, we know that there are many scriptural passages which support marriage and sexual relation. Our author tries to reconcile with them by putting all of them as the minor laws for the Upright group. He completely ignores the blessing of the Creator «be fruitful and multiply (ܐܬܬܠܝܕ ܐܬܬܠܝܕ)»¹²². He puts these key words into the mouth of the «evil one» to neutralize this blessing and to disregard the sexuality. See the evil one's advice:

look, gold and silver are on the earth and all sorts of pleasures. Possess and enjoy yourself; rule increase and multiply¹²³.

7.6 The birth of Eve from Adam's side¹²⁴

For our author, the sexual reproduction is man's choice which later got approval of God. Suppose if he never chose that way, it would be God's responsibility to provide humanity an appropriate way to multiply and to keep the generations.

if he had wanted he could have made children by the hairs of their heads or

by their finger nails, and the people would have become the images of angels (ܐܢܠܝܡܐ ܐܢܠܝܡܐ)¹²⁵.

From his explanation we feel about his suggestion similar to cloning or grafting. In short, according to our author, God originally intended an «asexual way of reproduction». Here Eve's birth from the side of Adam is put forward as an example of such a possibility. Eve is presented as Adam's daughter.

If all people desire to become holy, I would create for them children just as I made a daughter for Adam from himself, without marriage and without lust (ܠܐܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ)¹²⁶.

7.7 Adam's existence in the dual Paradise

Adam in his original state is presented as one who enjoyed double citizenship. His mind was in heaven, while the body on earth¹²⁷.

God first commanded Adam to become a perfect saint (ܐܢܬܝܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ ܐܢܬܝܢ), just like the watchers and angels in heaven(ܐܢܠܝܡܐ ܐܢܠܝܡܐ), so that while standing physically on earth, being stripped of everything in it, he might dwell spiritually in heaven with the angels while his mind is clothed with the glory of his

¹²¹ Cf. PS III, 336-337(15,1-2)

¹²² Cf. Gn 1,28

¹²³ The blessing of Lord God to multiply and dominate the world mentioned in Gn 1,28 is here put into the mouth of the Satan to disregard the sexual union.

¹²⁴ Cf. Gn 2,21-23.

¹²⁵ PS III, 602¹⁷⁻¹⁹(21,7).

¹²⁶ PS III, 740¹⁻²(25,3)

¹²⁷ Cf. PS III, 592⁸⁻⁹(21,3).

but they came to know evil which is death.

7.8.1 Tree of Life

In the KM «the Tree of Life» is identified with Christ.

The good tree(ܐܝܬܐ ܬܝܒܐ), in that world of light invisible to the eye of flesh (ܕܝܠܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܐܢܐ), is our Lord Jesus. He is the Tree of life(ܐܝܬܐ ܬܝܒܐ) who gives everything life by its fruits...¹³⁸

7.8.2 Tree of the knowledge of good and evil

For our author the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (ܐܝܬܐ ܕܥܝܢܐ ܕܥܡܐܢܐ) is the «evil one, toil, anxiety, and the thought of transitory things by which Adam and Eve tasted death»¹³⁹. It is clearly stated that Satan is called Tree. The commandment of God to not eat from this tree¹⁴⁰ is death as the result of the violation¹⁴¹

7.9 Sin: An Act of free will

The KM perceives sin as an act of free will¹⁴². More than disobedience here sin is a shift of one's focus from heavenly to earthly concerns¹⁴³. The desire of earth is equated with the death

and evil¹⁴⁴. The death is not the casting off the body for our author but «death is the sins, offenses and faults. So Adam tasted the death first, before he casted off his body»¹⁴⁵.

7.10 The episode of the deception of Satan

The episode of the attempts to tempt the first couple is also a fabricated version of biblical tradition. He inserted his idea and arguments skillfully in this scene too. The temptation is compared to that of Jesus. Eve is presented as a mediator between Adam and the deceitful one. It is interesting to cite the fabricated version of evil one's talk:

He counselled Eve to advise Adam and commanded her to speak to Adam so that he might acquire wealth and become a king. «look, gold and silver are on the earth and all sorts of pleasures. Possess and enjoy yourself; rule increase and multiply¹⁴⁶», evil one counseled. «Cast off from yourself asceticism and renunciation and holiness, also lowliness, and know evil as well as good things and grow and become like God who created you^{147,148}.

¹⁴⁴PS III 584⁴⁻¹²(21,1); 612¹²⁻²⁴(21,10); 625²⁰⁻²⁶(21,17).

¹⁴⁵PS III, 729⁴⁻²⁶(24,8).

¹⁴⁶ The blessing of Lord God to multiply and dominate the world mentioned in Gn 1,28 is here put into the mouth of the Satan to disregard the sexual union.

¹⁴⁷ Allusion to Gn 1, 28 and 3, 5.

¹³⁸ PS III, 589³⁻⁵(21,2).

¹³⁹ Cf. PS III, 584³⁻⁵(21,1).

¹⁴⁰ Gn 27,17a; PS III, 585¹⁰⁻¹²(21,1).

¹⁴¹ Cf. Gn 27, 17b; PS III, 793⁴⁻⁵(28,5).

¹⁴² PS III, 612⁹⁻¹⁴(21,10).

¹⁴³ PS III, 684⁴⁻¹²(21,1).

He inserted all his ascetical visions to the biblical scenes to exhort his audience.

8. Some important expressions from OT

Some expressions from OT deserve our attention.

8.1. *Manna*¹⁴⁹ and *Coats*¹⁵⁰

While speaking about the state of perfection, i.e. the state like Angels we could see two concepts of OT, manna and the coat.

In the KM it is the duty of the upright to feed the needy, specially the perfect. The perfect are like and angels and for our author not intended for work.

The angels do not cultivate, but they are always in presence of Lord. Similarly the perfect should imitate angels and preach the word of God. Through the upright our Lord will feed them¹⁵¹. «But if everyone desired to renounce the earth and come to perfection, our Lord would not hold them back on account of food and clothing, but would make manna(ܡܢܢܐ) descend as he had done for the Israelites in the desolate desert without seed and had no crop in it. He would have made

coats(ܠܒܝܫܐ) as he had done for Adam and Eve on that day when they sinned greatly»¹⁵².

8.2 *He said: I am the first and I am the Last*¹⁵³

We have seen that for our author Perfection is to going back to the original state of Adam before the fall. In this context he quoted this verse to say that:

See that the thing that the Lord desired at first is what he also desired at the last. Because of this he said « ܠܐ ܠܐܠܐ ܐܝܢ ܠܐܠܐ ܠܐܠܐ ܠܐܠܐ I am the first and I am the Last », that is my great and perfect will, the first and the last¹⁵⁴.

Conclusion

By analysing the OT verses in the KM one will easily be struck by the free interpretation of the author for giving sound biblical basis for his arguments. Many of the biblical passages and the great figures of OT were his instruments to support the main institutions of the KM, viz., the Perfect and the Upright. The main focus of our author was on the first chapters of the Book of Genesis. He was not that much strict about the exactness of the cited verses of the Scripture. Rather mainly he depended on

¹⁴⁸ PS III, 609⁴⁻¹²(21,9).

¹⁴⁹ Cf. Ex 16.

¹⁵⁰ Cf. Gn 3, 21.

¹⁵¹ Cf. PS III, 752 (25,8).

¹⁵² PS III, 752²²-753⁴(25,8).

¹⁵³ Cf. Is 44, 6; Rev 22,13; PS III, 597⁸⁻⁹(21,5).

¹⁵⁴ PS III, 597⁵⁻⁹(21,5).

the biblical themes and used his memory to cite them in the work. We have to appreciate his proficiency in using the Scripture to present his exhortations. The only book quoted in the entire work is the Bible –whose canon was at that time in a fluid state. So many scholars are trying to find the influences of

Deutrocanonical as well as apocryphal writings in it. We can't deny the influences of such traditions originated in the milieu of our author and the readers. Here we focused only on the *KM* and never tried to find similar usages in other Syriac Fathers. So there exist multiple possibilities for further researches and studies.

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NEWS

Benevolent Acts from Pope Francis in the Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy

In preparation for the upcoming Extraordinary Jubilee Year of Divine Mercy (08 December 2015 - 20 November 2016), Pope Francis has already announced certain benevolent acts. During the year of mercy, he has given the special faculty to all priests to absolve the grave sin of abortion, which was traditionally reserved to the bishops in ordinary situations. Pope Francis has also issued two *motuproprii* *Mitis Iudex Dominus Iesus* and *Mitiset Misericors Iesus* by which he introduced new reforms in the Latin and Oriental Canon laws with regard to the canonical process for declaring invalid marriages null and void. Pope also invited every parish in Europe to adopt a refugee family each, which flees away from Syria and Iraq as victims of religious fundamentalism of the exponents of Islamic State Republic. Pope himself has already hosted a Syrian refugee family of Greek Melkite rite from Damascus in a Vatican-owned apartment.

New Patriarch for the Armenian Catholic Church

The Synod of Bishops of the Armenian Catholic Church elected Bishop Ghabroyan as the new Catholicos Patriarch of the Armenian Church. He took the name Krikor Bedros XX Gabroyan and succeeded his predecessor Patriarch Nerses Bedros XII Tarmouni. The new Patriarch was ordained bishop in 1977 and was serving the Armenian Catholics in France. During the *sedevacante*, he served also as administrator of the Church. His Beatitude was officially enthroned on 9 August 2015 in Bzommar, Lebanon.

New Exarchate for Syro Malabar Church in Canada

Pope Francis erected an Apostolic Exarchate for Syro Malabar Catholics in Canada and nominated Rev. Fr. Jose Kalluvilil of the Eparchy of Palghat as the first exarch. Around 9000 Syro Malabar faithful live in Canada. The see of the new apostolic exarchate is Mississauga, near Toronto.

New Bishops for the Syro Malabar Church

Three new bishops were appointed for the Syro Malabar Church. Pope Francis appointed Rev. Fr Joseph Kodakallil as the third bishop of the Eparchy of Satna in Madhya Pradesh. He was serving as the Proto Syncellus and parish priest of St Vincent Cathedral, Satna. Rev. Fr Antony Prince Panengadan was nominated by Pope Francis as the second Bishop of the Diocese of Adilabad in Telangana. He has been serving the diocese as its Proto-Syncellus and the Cathedral Vicar. Rev. Fr Antony Kariyil was elected by the Synod of the Syro Malabar Church as the second bishop of the Eparchy of Mandya in Karnataka. He was serving as the director of Rajagiri School of Engineering and Technology. The territory of the Mandya diocese is also extended, including Chickballapur, Kolar, Ramnagar and Tumkur districts, besides Bengaluru Urban, Bengaluru Rural. The diocese comprises of the civil districts of Mandya, Hassan, Mysore and Khamarajnar.

New Catholicos Patriarch for the Assyrian Church of the East

The Holy Synod of the Assyrian Church of the East elected His Beatitude Mar Geevargheese Sliwa as its new Patriarch. He succeeds the late Patriarch His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV and will assume the ecclesiastical name Mar Geevarghese III. The newly elected Patriarch was the metropolitan of the the Assyrian Church of the East in Iraq, Jordan and Russia. He was consecrated Metropolitan of Iraq in 1981 by His Holiness Mar Dinkha IV in Chicago, Illinois. He was serving the faithful of Baghdad, Basra, Kirkuk, Mosul and their surroundings with the title Metropolitan of Iraq, Jordan and Russia.

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